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Rollo, the Boy Ranger; OR, The Heiress of the Golden Horn.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "VAGABOND JOE," "THE DUMB
SPY," "ANTELOPE ABE," "KEEN-KNIFE,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. ROLLO, THE RANGER.

OVER the great plain at a breakneck speed, and down toward the little settlement of Clontarf's Post, rode a youthful horseman whose fair young face was aglow with health, and whose dark, bright eyes roamed restlessly over the green expanse before him.

From beneath a small plumed cap of scarlet velvet, masses of dark-brown hair floated on the wind. He was a mere youth in appearance—of seventeen perhaps, and though he was light of form and lithe of limb, his physical and muscular development was that of perfect manhood.

He wore a tunic of dark-blue cloth, ornamented with bright yellow trimmings, and confined at the slender waist with a handsome belt with silver fastenings. Buck-skin leggings and buck-skin moccasins were upon his tapering limbs and shapely feet.

The boyish face wore a lovely, yet fearless expression. His hands were as small, smooth and shapely as a maiden's, yet, like his face, they had become colored to a dusky brown by exposure to the hot sun and wind of the prairie.

In addition to the handsome rifle which he

carried slung over his shoulder by means of a strap, and the handsome silver-mounted revolvers he wore in his belt, he carried a light saber in a polished scabbard at his side.

He was mounted upon a dark, mettlesome pony—a cross of the Mexican and mustang breed. A fine Mexican saddle and a bridle made of braided horse-hair, caparisoned the animal. On one side of the pommel of the saddle hung a coiled silver horn; on the other side a double-lensed spy-glass. With the latter the young ranger ever and anon swept the great plain before him as though he were not satisfied with the sight of his own bright, flashing eyes.

Rollo, the Boy Ranger, for as such he was known, pushed rapidly on, and soon he had gained a bold eminence upon the plain. Here, amid the tall, luxuriant grass that crowned its crest, he drew rein and gazed away toward the



"I WILL HALT AND FIRE—THEN I WILL BE CERTAIN," CRIED THE BOY, AND HE WAS DRAWING REIN, WHEN—

west, where a grand sight was spread out before him.

The little Sioux river divided the landscape, and with its almost illimitable forest upon the west, and its undulating ocean verdure upon the east, it seemed but a silver thread winding through a field of green cloth. And down in the valley, upon the east side of the river, nestled a dozen or more log-cabins, a block-house, all surrounded by a strong stockade that had withstood more than one siege of the savage denizens of the forest and plain.

Outside of this settlement, which was known as Clontarf's Post, were a number of small fields of growing wheat and corn; while beyond the fields a herd of cattle in the care of two boys was grazing upon the prairie. Everything, in fact, surrounding the post wore an air of the thrift, industry and enterprise of its settlers.

Upon Clontarf's Post, Rollo the ranger fixed his gaze, as though something of uncommon interest depended upon the sight.

With the exception of a few children at play in front of the cabin-doors, the young ranger could see no life in the settlement.

To obtain a better view of the place, he took his spy-glass and brought it to bear upon the settlement. A smile of satisfaction overspread his fair young face as he did so. Within one of the largest cabins whose door stood open, he saw a number of persons collected.

"They are all there," he said, aloud. "The trial is still in session, and I fear it will go hard with poor Dick Sherwood. The settlers are very strict, and if they prove the facts under which Dick was captured, he is bound to hang. Ah! I am not a minute too soon!"

The last remarks were occasioned by seeing a number of men issue from the cabin into the yard. A great excitement seemed to prevail in their midst.

Bringing his glass to his eyes, the young ranger soon learned the cause of the settlers' commotion.

In their midst stood a man with hands bound behind his back, and a rope around his neck; and upon him all faces were turned, scowling dark with vengeance and hate.

After a few moments' delay in front of the cabin, the ranger saw the men move away toward the gate of the stockade, leading the bound man like a haltered beast in their midst.

The brow of the young ranger darkened.

"Yes," he fairly groaned. "Dick is doomed to die. They are leading him into the forest. They intend to hang him—hang him! A rope is already around his neck. There is no mercy in their hearts. Border justice knows no mercy."

As he spoke, he kept the spy-glass leveled upon the party of settlers, who, filing out of the stockade, moved down to the river-bank. Here they embarked in a number of canoes for the opposite shore, and not until they had landed and plunged into the leafy depths of the forest did the ranger lower his glass.

The pupils of his dark eyes were expanded with long gazing. His brow knitted, and a shade of sadness and regret passed over his face.

He spoke to his animal and it bounded away. Just then there was a quick rustling in the tall grass before him, and a powerful Indian warrior—a giant in stature—leaped forward, and seizing the reins, jerked the pony back almost upon its haunches.

Quick of movement, and apparently conscious of the danger that threatened his young rider, the pony regained its footing, and rearing upward upon its hind feet until Rollo nearly fell from the saddle, the sagacious beast struck the savage upon the head with both of his iron-shod hoofs with such force that the giant was brought to the earth, his tufted skull completely crushed.

This sudden uprising, and equally sudden downfall, of the red assailant, occurred so quick that it was all over before the young ranger could really define the true condition of affairs. But he soon found that the dead warrior was not alone. Two others, one on each side of him, both equally as demon-like in appearance as the dead giant, arose from the tall grass and bounded toward him.

The hand of the ranger dropped to his saber. There was a lightning-like flash of the polished blade as it leaped from the scabbard into the sunlight. Then there was a flash upon the right, and a flash upon the left, and the bold ranger dashed away. But, there was blood upon his saber, for both strokes had done their fearful work, and three savage warriors lay dead upon the plain!

The young ranger dashed on over the plain as calmly as though nothing had happened.

Finally, however, he drew rein again, and swept the prairie with his glass. But not a living object was visible anywhere upon the face of the great, green expanse.

Even the settlement was hidden from his view by an intervening wave of the prairie sea, and he seemed alone upon the trackless waste. However, he took the coiled horn from the pommel of the saddle and blew a blast upon it so shrill and harsh that it caused his animal to shake his head.

The young man bent his head in the attitude of listening when he removed the horn from his lips, and faintly to his ears came the sound resembling the far-off echo of his own horn.

A smile passed over his face.

"Ah! they have heard it, and have replied. Now my good Dart"—patting his pony's neck—"we have a hard ride before us—ah, there they go!"

He raised his head as he spoke, and from behind the crest of a hill nearly a mile away, he saw a dozen or more mounted Sioux Indians emerge, riding at a wild, reckless speed down toward Clontarf's Post. They were hideous with war-paint, and decked and plumed in all the paraphernalia of savage warfare.

It was plain to be seen that their mission was one of death and destruction. And it was still plainer that they had marked Clontarf's Post as their point of beginning.

Evidently they had seen the men leaving the post, and had determined to take advantage of their absence and destroy their stronghold and slay their women and children.

Rollo, the ranger, put spur and dashed away, keeping to the right of the Indians and watching them all the while with a curious expression upon his face. By a circuitous route he reached the river about a mile above the post.

The banks of the stream were low and unobstructed, and scarcely checking his speed, the ranger spurred his foam-flecked animal into the river and swam it across to the opposite side, and then dashed away in the deep shadows of the great, green woods.

CHAPTER II.

THE "HALTER" OF JUSTICE.

CLONTARF'S Post had first been settled by Lionel Clontarf, a gentleman of Irish descent. It was among the first settlements of the then territory of Iowa, and, although in the midst of privations, and harassed by the red-man, it grew and prospered as but few under similar circumstances would have done.

Family after family, with brave hearts and willing hands, were added to the settlement, until it numbered some fifty souls.

Stock-raising and agriculture were the chief objects of the settlers, though in course of time a store and Indian trading-post were opened. At this point, all the surrounding settlements—which in fact were few—obtained their supplies, and many dollars' worth of furs and peltries were brought here and exchanged by the Indians for flour, powder, and ammunition of all kinds, and such trinkets as pleased their savage fancy or wants. The settlers did all within their power to keep up a friendly intercourse between themselves and the Indians. This they would have had no trouble in doing, but for the influence of unprincipled white men, who, driven from the society of their own race, sought shelter within the red-man's lodges, or the mountain fastnesses, where they organized themselves into bands to rob and murder the unfortunate settler or emigrant.

Through the instrumentality of these white outlaws, the Indians were kept in an almost constant state of hostilities, and it behooved the whites ever to be upon their guard, and use every exertion toward ridding the country of all those prime roots of border troubles—the white robber, and the white renegade.

Among the latter class of outlaws, who had become notorious for his deep cunning and wickedness, was one Dick Sherwood, whose crimes were multitudinous. And for some cause or other, Clontarf's Post was the central point around which this moth of Satan seemed to flutter most of all. It seemed that he cherished a natural antipathy toward the place, or some of its people, and tried in vain, by every means that his cunning brain could concoct, to destroy it.

Finally he had the audacious boldness to disguise himself in the paint and garb of an Indian, and come to the post on a pretended mission of peace. He was kindly received by the men at the post, who had supposed him a genuine Indian sent by his people to make some terms of peace, as a deadly hostility had existed between them for the past six months.

A council was called, and a treaty of peace at once entered into, by and between the settlers and the great chief, Rolling Thunder, as he called himself.

After the treaty was concluded, the chief remained at the post a day or two; and, but for his attempting to carry away Miss Clara Bryant, one of the fairest jewels of the post, on taking his leave of the settlement, his disguise would never have been penetrated. However, he was caught at his little game of abduction and taken prisoner. By a vigorous application of water by means of numerous duckings in the river, his feathers were caused to droop and his mask of paint to wash away; and the great messenger of peace—the mighty Rolling Thunder, was found to be the notorious renegade, Dick Sherwood.

The vengeance of the settlers was at once aroused. The villain was locked up in the block-house, the remainder of the night upon which he was captured, and the next day he was led forth for trial.

According to their notion of border justice, the settlers of Clontarf's Post found Sherwood guilty of crime punishable by death, and so he was condemned to be hanged in the forest on the morrow.

The morrow came. It was the day upon which our story opens.

The prisoner was led forth from his prison, in the midst of a group of men. It was this group that young Rollo, the ranger, saw from the crest of the prairie wave.

Dick Sherwood was a young man of not more than five and twenty. Of figure he was of medium height, and was a perfect model of the physical man. His head was of the intellectual mold, and but for the evil light in his black eyes he would have been a handsome man.

As his captors led him from the stockade like a haltered ox, his face wore no downcast look, and his step was firm and elastic. Even in his helpless condition, and in face of the death to which he was being hurried, he was recklessly cheerful, and made many remarks touching his situation, that produced laughter among the settlers, and even made a curious impression upon some of their hearts.

The execution was to take place in the woods across the river, and two of the settlers had been sent on some time in advance to select a tree for the purpose, and dig a grave.

When the party crossed the river with the prisoner, they were met by the two men and conducted to the place of execution, which was beneath the branching boughs of a great oak.

A large limb growing out at right-angles with the body of the tree had been trimmed of its shrubbery, and near the foot of the tree a grave was dug.

As the prisoner gazed upon these preparations for his execution, he smiled grimly, defiantly.

"Why go to this trouble, gentlemen?" he asked, pointing toward the grave. "Why not let my body hang for the hungry wolf, the carrion-crow and the vulture to feed upon? Know you not that the spirit will not complain of your treatment of the body? The wolf and the vulture will not devour my bones, and so long as the grim skeleton exists, so long will the spirit remain about it."

"You are disposed to jest, Dick Sherwood," said Lionel Clontarf, a stern, stony-hearted man; "you should think of the great Hereafter, and then perhaps your heart will move the spirit differently."

"Yes," added Geoffrey Bryant, "think of the lives you have destroyed, and the homes you have made sad and desolate, and then, if you have a conscience, you will feel a pang of remorse. Your heart will shrink from the terrible punishment awaiting you."

"I am really conscious of all this, gentlemen," replied Sherwood, tauntingly, "but my greatest regrets are that I did not succeed in escaping with Miss Bryant, for then it would have been heaven instead of—"

"Hang the villain! hang the wretch!" burst from the lips of some of the crowd.

"Dick Sherwood," said old Captain Storms, the leader of the party, "if you have any thing of reason to say, say it at once; if not—"

"Certainly," interrupted Sherwood; "I was going to suggest that some improvements be made upon that grave for my ease and comfort; but I will not occupy it long, so go your length, gentlemen. Should I ever address you again it will be under different—quite different auspices."

The settlers grew indignant at these taunting, defiant remarks, and at once proceeded to the execution.

Four men drew the cleared limb as low as

possible and held it down. To this Captain Storms tied the rope which already encircled the renegade's neck.

Lionel Clontarf bound a handkerchief over the prisoner's eyes, and then, at a signal from Captain Storms, the four men relinquished their hold upon the limb which arose to its natural position, and then Dick Sherwood hung between heaven and earth!

The wretched man struggled desperately, but his efforts momentarily grew feebler. The settlers stood in speechless silence and gazed upon the hanging form until it had ceased to move.

Surely life was extinct.

Finally Captain Storms advanced and placed his fingers upon the renegade's pulse, and said in a low tone:

"He's dead, boys, dead, dead; and may God have mercy upon his soul."

As he uttered the last word a startled exclamation burst from the lips of the crowd.

A horseman had burst suddenly from the forest into their midst.

It was Rollo, the ranger! His horse was white with foam, and his own face streaked with perspiration and flushed with excitement.

"Away, men, away!" the youth shouted, wildly, "away for your homes, your wives and your children! The Indians are upon the post!"

"My God!" burst from the lips of Lionel Clontarf; "come, men, follow me! I can already hear the yells of the demons and the clash of arms!"

"But the body of Sherwood," cried one, "what will be—"

"Let it hang! Away!" responded old Captain Storms.

Fear seemed to lend the settlers invisible wings as they ran through the woods toward the post, the boy ranger following close at their heels upon his almost exhausted animal.

Had the settlers, however, on turning their backs upon the hanging renegade, given the young ranger a second glance, they would have seen something that would have aroused some curiosity, if not suspicions, in their minds. Wild with excitement and fear, however, they ran on, the safety of their families being uppermost in their minds.

When the river was reached, the settlers hastily embarked for the opposite shore in their canoes, the ranger swimming his animal behind.

When they came in sight of the post the men saw that the place was being bravely defended by the few men that had remained behind.

The enemy were mounted, and in number did not exceed a dozen. They had divided their force, and the large party were directing their attack upon the eastern gate of the stockade.

Seeing the inferiority in number of the enemy, the settlers gave a yell as they approached, and the next moment the savages were flying over the plain at a breakneck speed, leaving one of their number behind, dead.

The bloodless termination—on the part of the settlers—of what promised a bloody affray, resulted in Rollo, the Boy Ranger, being lionized as the real hero of the victory. He was fairly dragged from his pony and forced to accept the warm, heartfelt thanks and blessings bestowed upon him, for his timely warning them of danger.

The young ranger seemed ill at ease within the stockade, and contrary to the wishes of the settlers, he soon took his departure.

"I can not bear the confinement of the settlement," he said, on leaving the post. "I feel freer when roaming on the great prairie ocean, or threading the shadowy aisles of the forest."

He rode away toward the north when he left the post, on the trail of the defeated redskins.

To the surprise of the settlers, on going to inter the body of the slain enemy, they found that it was the body of a white man in Indian disguise. This discovery caused no little food for reflection, and old Captain Storms, well versed in the nature of the Indian, gave it as his belief that the whole party of mounted enemies were a party of white men, and robbers at that, in Indian disguise. The old captain's reason for this belief was that the enemy had been too bold and reckless in their attack, which set at variance all he had ever seen of Indian caution, cunning and cowardice.

During the remainder of that day and the following night, guards were stationed at all the points surrounding the post, and the stock secured against a night stampede. But, fortunately, no further hostile demonstration was made by the enemy.

The following morning, however, a number of Indians were seen in the edge of the timber along the river on the opposite shore. This prevented the settlers from crossing over to inter the body of Dick Sherwood, the renegade, as they had intended to do.

On the second day, vultures were seen hovering over the forest, and it was then that every Christian energy of the settlers was aroused, and they at once crossed the river and proceeded to the scene of execution.

But to their horror and disgust, they found only a human skeleton bleaching in the sun, where they had last seen the body of the renegade hanging.

The gaunt wolf and the carrion-crow had been there. And as the white, ghastly skeleton swayed to and fro in the breeze—seeming still possessed of life—the settlers shuddered, for it brought up quite forcibly in their minds the words of the renegade, "As long as my bones exist the spirit will remain about them."

Was it possible that these words were prophetic?

The remains were taken down and buried, and then the party returned home, feeling that they were at last free from the persecutions of the renegade, Dick Sherwood.

CHAPTER III.

A PROPOSED MEETING.

THREE months after the execution of the renegade passed by, and the settlers of Clontarf's Post in that time had experienced a season of peace and quietude seldom enjoyed by a border settlement. The Indians had made no hostile demonstration, though many feared that their quietude foretold a coming storm, and many thought the death of Dick Sherwood accounted for their peacefulness. Be that as it may, the settlers never allowed one point admissible of attack from the enemy to remain unguarded for a single hour; for, knowing their cunning and treacherous nature, and since no regular treaty had been entered into, they thought it more than likely that the Indians were watching for a chance to strike at the post when its people were off their guard.

In the midst of their peace and prosperity, the settlers were not forgetful from whence came all those blessings they were being permitted to enjoy, and once or twice a week they would meet at one of the neighbors' houses and offer up thanks to their Heavenly Father for his protection and bountiful gifts. Each and every Sabbath, divine services were held at the residence of the Reverend Paul Earnshaw, a minister of much ability, and dearly beloved by all his friends.

During the latter part of the month of August, Mr. Earnshaw began a spiritual revival at the post, attended with great success. Encouraged in his good work by his friends, he soon extended his labors to other settlements—such as were not too remote from the post.

While laboring at one of these settlements, a new minister made his appearance in the field. He came from the East, he told Father Earnshaw, to labor among the Indians. He had not been sent out by a missionary society, but had come on his own responsibility to preach to the heathen. He gave his name as Israel Ainesley. He was an aged man, but possessed of wonderful strength and activity, and a voice deep, strong and musical.

The good people of Valley Settlement, anxious to procure the services of so able a minister as Father Ainesley's first sermon proved him to be, prevailed on him to take up his residence there.

With some reluctance the reverend father accepted the kind invitation of the settlers; however, he made a reservation of half of his time to be devoted to labor among the Indians.

Father Earnshaw now returned to Clontarf's Post; not, however, before having exacted a promise from his fellow-laborer in the vineyard of God, to visit him at an early day.

Father Ainesley went to work with a zeal both at the settlement and among the Indians. At least he was away from Valley Settlement a good half of the time, and the settlers had no reason to question his being at work trying to convert the wild red-men.

In the course of a week, Father Ainesley sent a letter to Father Earnshaw, in which he proposed that they hold a union meeting of the two settlements; and in case that he should accept the proposition, to name the point of meeting, as well as the day.

Father Earnshaw sent the following reply:

"CLONTARF'S POST, Sept. 2, 18—

"DEAR BROTHER AINESLEY:

"Your proposition of a union meeting of the two settlements receives my hearty approval. It would be likely to establish a firmer and more pleasant relationship between the two settlements, and lay the foundation of a Christian country and people. Since you have left it with me to set the day of meeting, I will name the 10th of September. And since, in my opinion, there is nothing to fear from the Indians, I shall propose that we hold our meeting in the woods, God's first temples, on the shore of Lake Wildwood. It is a lovely spot, adorned with all the beauty of nature—the great, green woods upon one side, and Wildwood Lake upon the other; the heavens above and a velvety carpet of green beneath.

"Hoping that this brief reply will fully meet your approval,

"I remain yours in Christ,

"PAUL EARNSHAW."

The reply did meet the Reverend Ainesley's approval, and every arrangement was at once made for the meeting of the two settlements upon the tenth of September.

But little did the great, kind-hearted settlers dream of the deep and damnable plot that was being laid for their destruction by one of these men wearing the sacerdotal robes of a minister of God.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ATTACK.

ABOUT four miles north-west of Clontarf's Post, in a secluded spot, stood a solitary log-cabin, surrounded on all sides by the dark, towering forest. It was a rude structure without, but its interior bore evidence of ease and comfort. But, the location was one sufficient to inspire the heart with awe, for, from morning till night, the dark shadows hung over the hut. Even if a patch of sunlight did fall upon it, it came and went like a white-robed specter.

Here, within this lonely and desolate hut, dwelt, with his daughter Madge, Talbott Taft, the Indian trader. Why he had selected this obscure spot for a dwelling was a mystery to settlers thereabouts. And why he, a man of no little intellectual culture, had left the refinement of civilization and brought his beautiful and accomplished daughter into the wilderness of a savage land, was still a greater mystery.

Talbott Taft was in the prime of manhood, with but little gray in his hair and whiskers; and the "crow's feet" about his eyes seemed rather premature, than the marks of Time. His features, though extremely delicate, bore no evidence of dissipation, yet his dark eyes were wonderfully strange in their expression.

His articles of traffic consisted of whisky, tobacco and beads. These he obtained at a large trading-post on the Missouri river, and traded to the savages for furs and peltries.

The settlers of Clontarf's Post often called at the cabin of the trader, and were kindly received and cared for. But no one had ever been there but what, on leaving, had declared that there was some mystery about Talbott Taft.

Madge Taft was a woman of more than ordinary beauty. She was not more than eighteen, judging from her looks, but from the beautiful and perfect development of her form, one would suppose her to be one and twenty. Her eyes were dark, lustrous and brilliant, possessed of an expression that was indicative of a wild, joyful and fearless spirit—such as only a true heroine could possess. Her hair was black and fine as silk, clustering about her head in shapely ringlets. Her complexion was healthful and white as alabaster, and the hues of the rose and lily were blended in her cheeks. Her hands were small, white and shapely, yet no circlets of gold flashed upon her tapering fingers.

Few young men, and in fact old men, upon whose hearts there was no previous claims, ever called at the cabin of Talbott Taft and went away without realizing the fact that they were in love with the trader's lovely daughter.

But of the many whose hearts had been thus captivated, but a single one had ever received a friendly notice from the forest beauty. This son of fortune was a well-to-do young man of Clontarf's Post, named Townsend Farnsworth. His attentions to Madge were encouraged so far as to be permitted to call frequently at the cabin.

Early on the morning of the tenth of September, the day set for the camp-meeting at Wildwood lake, Town. Farnsworth called at the cabin of Talbott Taft to accompany Madge to the meeting. He found her awaiting him, and

looking more lovely and bewitching than he had ever seen her before.

They did not tarry at the cabin, but at once set off for the lake, which was some two miles distant.

Their walk through the cool shaded aisles of the forest was pleasant and exhilarating; and they seemed unusually happy in each other's society, and chatted and laughed as only youthful lovers could have done. Yet neither knew that the other really did love, for no avowal had ever passed their lips.

Arrived at the appointed place of meeting, the young people found that they were the first there, and to pass the time as pleasantly as possible, they walked down to the lake shore and seated themselves upon a moss-covered trunk of a fallen tree.

Wildwood lake lay before them, calm and placid, resembling a great mirror set in a rustic frame. No object was visible upon its glassy, unruffled surface to break the sameness of the glittering sheet.

The lake was perhaps a mile and a half in circumference, and it was bounded nearly all around with tall, frowning rocks, whose white faces were plowed and fluted by the wear of time. Here and there the black mouth of a subterranean vault was visible, partially hidden by creeping vines and tall aquatic plants.

Town and Madge gazed out upon the lake, and it would have been an easy matter for a close observer to have marked the difference in the expression of each gaze. While Town's look showed that his mind was upon something else besides the beauty of the lake, Madge's gaze showed that she was gazing, with no little interest and anxiety, and a look of half-expectation, carefully over the bosom of the glimmering sheet.

Town was too deeply absorbed in the tumultuous fluttering of his heart, to note the expression of his fair companion's face. After a moment's silence, he said:

"Wildwood seems unusually calm this morning."

"And lonely," replied Madge. "I wonder where those flocks of beautiful wild ducks and geese are that are most always seen upon the lake?"

"It is very probable that they are lying along in the cool shadow of the shores, or among the reeds and rushes over yonder."

"The lake looks quite lonely without them," said Madge. "Many pleasant moments have I spent here alone watching the feathered tribes gliding over the water, and—"

"Then you love to be alone—you love solitude, Madge?" questioned Town, with a perceptible change in his voice.

Madge raised her eyes and gazed into the young man's face, as if touched by his question.

"Are there not times, Town," she asked, "when you would rather be alone than in company with your best friend?"

"Yes; but not my *dearest* friend. When I wish for solitude it is only to think and dream of you, dear Madge. Since we first met, my heart has gone out to you in the most passionate love, and I have longed for this moment, Madge, to ask you to be mine—mine forever!"

Madge was quite indifferent to this declaration of love. She had long been expecting it, and was prepared. As she lifted her eyes to those of Town, a smile, in which there was a shadow of sarcasm, passed over her face.

"You are jesting, Town," she said, a little reproachfully. "You do not know the desire of your own heart. When you have thought more of the matter, and consulted your own feelings and mind, you may have reason to feel a pang of regret that you ever asked the wild, wayward daughter of a poor Indian trader to be your wife."

"Madge, do not doubt my affection and judgment in this matter. My heart is immovable, and I love you all the more for your humble life. It would not be a marriage of a prince and peasant, but two whose love I trust would be equal, as well as their birth."

"Town," said Madge, and there was a slight tremor in her voice, "are you sure that Clara Bryant has no claim upon your heart? I know Clara loves you, Town, and would make you a better wife than I."

"Until I saw you, Madge, I thought I did love Clara, but since our first meeting I find it was but pure friendship compared with the love I hold for you."

"Then your love for me is of but a momentary growth. Dismiss me from your mind, and you will find that the heart will go back to its first love."

"You do not love me, Madge, else you would

not trifle with my feelings thus," he said, a little vexed.

"No, no, Town; I will frankly admit that I love you, but can not promise you now to be your wife."

Town. Farnsworth felt a thrill of joy pass through his heart, and his arm stole softly about the slender waist of the maiden. She gently withdrew from his embrace and continued:

"Do not let my avowal of love for you, Town, build up new hopes within your breast. I must admit the sin of being ambitious, and I could never give my consent to wed a man whose name was coupled with that of—"

"Cowardice!" exclaimed Town.

"Exactly, Town."

"Madge!" and the young man's voice grew stronger, and his eyes flashed indignantly, "then you, too, have given credence to that false report of a cowardly enemy!"

"I could not help it, Town, when so many spoke of it. I may be doing you injustice to put any belief in it, but ambition, as I said before, is my besetting sin. Did you possess the fame of Rollo, the Boy Ranger, then I would not hesitate to become your wife."

"I can not blame you, Madge, for refusing to wed one who bears the name of a coward, but that I am *not* a coward, I shall prove to you, if I have to wade through fire and blood; and not until I have won a fame equal to that of Red Rollo's will I press my suit for your hand. All I ask now is that I may live in hope."

"You may, Town—but look yonder," she said, evasively, "what objects are those on the water just put out from the northern shore?"

Town. viewed the objects in question, closely:

"Ah!" he exclaimed, after a while, his eyes having been upon one thing and his mind another, "it is a flock of ducks—quite three score of them; and how gracefully they move over the surface, their green heads erect, on watch for the least sign of danger."

"How I love to watch them sporting over the smooth surface of the water!" said Madge. "They are so graceful in their movements—so shy and quick."

"I see, Madge, that you are a lover of nature, as well as ambitious—but had we not better return to the place of meeting? I see a large number of the settlers are there."

Madge consented, and together they joined the settlers.

They found that the people from each settlement were already arrived, and it wanted but few minutes of the hour for the beginning of service.

Town. and Madge seated themselves upon one of the many fallen logs that had been arranged for seats, and entered into conversation with those near them.

For a moment the young couple held the gaze of the assembly. Town. was the envy of all the marriageable youths there, while each maiden felt like hiding her own brown plain face as she gazed upon the fair, lovely features of Talbot Taft's daughter.

Madge greeted all their looks with a smile, and for a moment there was a "buzz" in that particular corner of the congregation. Even the eyes of the aged, sober, sanctimonious Israel Ainesley, who was seated alongside of Father Earnshaw on a raised platform, facing the congregation, became fixed upon the lovely face of the maiden with a kind of a fascinated gaze, which Madge acknowledged with a pleasant smile.

After a while the congregation engaged in singing, the sound of their voices rolling away in sweet, melodious anthems through the green forest aisles. And, too, the lake seemed to have caught the inspiration of the music within its own pulseless bosom and carried the sound back among its hills and caverns.

The spot selected for the meeting was well calculated to inspire the heart with the infinite power of God.

It was a smooth lawn sloping down to the water's edge, over which was thrown the cool shadows of the stately towering oaks. Upon one side, within full view of the congregation, lay the placid lake, and upon the other the great silent forest.

With the natural precaution born of backwoods life, the settlers had brought their side-arms with them, and had even posted guards out in the woods, some distance from the place of service, to guard against surprise. Still, no fears whatever had been entertained of danger from the Indians, as they had long been perfectly peaceful and quiet.

After singing, followed prayer by the Reverend

Mr. Earnshaw. Then Mr. Ainesley arose, and in a clear but tremulous voice announced his text; and at once began his discourse in a manner of force and ability that, from the first, enchanted the attention of his hearers. He possessed a power of eloquence and delivery profound and comprehensive. His comparisons were striking, and his similes beautiful.

The eyes of all the congregation, Madge's excepted, became riveted upon the speaker, and though the trader's daughter heard every word that was spoken, she sat in a kind of mental abstraction and gazed out upon the lake at the flock of wild ducks, which, since the beginning of the sermon, had continued to approach nearer and nearer that end of the lake, as though drawn thither by the magnetic influence that enabled the eloquent Mr. Ainesley to hold such a power over his audience.

Once during the discourse, the preacher, in calling the attention of his listeners to the presence of God in all the surroundings, turned toward the lake and said:

"In those beautiful fowls yonder, sailing so gracefully over the glassy surface of the element, behold the power, the wisdom—yea, the presence of God."

Of course all eyes followed in the direction of the speaker's, and every one within the assembly saw the flock of beautiful wild fowls, shyly, but slowly and steadily, nearing the beach.

Just then their ears were greeted by the loud report of a rifle on the opposite side of the lake, that came booming over the water like a sunset gun, and reverberating away back among the hills, and rolling in a prolonged clang and crash through the forest aisles.

A small jet of water flashing upward in the center of the flock of ducks showed the settlers where the bullet, sent from the hunter's rifle, had struck.

As the report of the rifle, which had so suddenly startled them, died away, a slight commotion was noticed among the settlers. By the report of the piece they knew full well who had fired it, for there was but one rifle of so heavy a caliber upon the border.

That rifle was owned by the celebrated hunter and scout known as Roll Raynor—nicknamed Old Tumult.

And the presence of Roll Raynor in the neighborhood betokened the coming of danger! However, the Rev. Mr. Ainesley soon quieted the fears of his audience and continued his discourse.

Madge Taft still sat, apparently in deep thought, watching the approaching fowls.

Suddenly, the ears of the audience were again greeted by the thunderous boom of Old Tumult's rifle. And before they had fully caught the full report of the gun, a wild and almost unearthly scream was heard to issue from the waters of the lake.

Every eye was turned in that direction, and to the awful horror of the settlers, they beheld the half-naked body of an Indian warrior leap upward from the water, but a few rods from the shore, HIS HEAD AND FACE CONCEALED IN A CAP MADE OF THE FEATHERED SKIN OF A WILD DUCK!

The savage had been shot through the head by a bullet from the rifle of Old Tumult, but no sooner did the death-wail peal from his lips, than the whole flock, of what the settlers had supposed to be *living* wild-ducks, was seen to rise up from the water upon the heads of as many half-naked savages, whose bloody war-whoops, as they dashed aside their feathered caps, and sprung ashore with drawn tomahawks, sent a thrill of terror to the stoutest heart.

CHAPTER V.

OLD TUMULT TO THE RESCUE.

My pen is inadequate to the task now before me—the task of describing that savage surprise, and the horrors that followed.

A desperate conflict at once began. Where peace and the enjoyment of religious exercise prevailed but a few moments previous, now death and carnage ran riot.

The yells of the demoniac savages, the shouts of the brave settlers as with knife and pistol they flew to the conflict, the shrieks of women and children, all mingled in one awful sound, and rolled through the forest like a voice from Pandemonium.

At the beginning of the conflict, Town. Farnsworth seized Madge and attempted to carry her beyond danger; but she tore herself from his arms and bravely dashed into the midst of the combatants. Town. attempted to follow her, but fell unconscious from a blow upon the head.

The armed guards came running in from the woods, and joined their friends in the conflict; and presently another voice was added to those of the combatants, but his was a voice resembling the roar of a maddened bull more than a human voice, and a tall, bony and muscular-looking man, with long, shaggy eyebrows, from beneath which two orbs of fire, a shock of grizzly gray hair, and a mouth so "extensive," that the upper part of his head seemed set on hinges at the back—made his appearance in behalf of the settlers.

This man of giant frame and cavernous mouth was Old Tumult, the hunter and scout.

He came like a whirlwind among the savages, his rifle grasped in one hand—a heavy club in the other.

The savages recoiled before him. They had felt the power of the giant hunter's iron arm before.

The dull thud of the hunter's club, accompanied with a yell, told how fearful and deadly was his work.

"Away, demons o' fury, away!" he shouted; "down to the brimstone pit—the sulphurous region!"

The savages wavered, rallied again and strove hard to beat down Old Tumult, but in vain. He seemed to bear a charmed life.

Finally the savages gave way and took to the cover of the forest, leaving a number of dead and dying comrades behind.

The settlers did not pursue the fleeing enemy. They were glad enough to get rid of them, and at once turned their attention to their own dead and dying comrades.

A frightful spectacle was now presented to the gaze of the settlers. A score of savages lay killed and wounded upon the grassy lawn, and among them, with their heads cloven, lay several of the settlers dead, and several wounded. The women and children, with a few exceptions, had fled into the forest at the commencement of the attack. Thus a new fear for their safety now preyed upon the minds of the settlers.

When the battle was over, Old Tumult, to whom the settlers gave the credit of defeating the red-skins, leaned his tall, gaunt form upon his heavy rifle, and gazed silently over the scene before him, with a sad look upon his hard, stony features.

"Ah, me! ah, me!" he sighed heavily, "if I'd a' known all, this 'ere would never 'a' been, friends."

"Yes, if any of us had dreamed of such an attack being planned, we might have prevented it," said the Reverend Paul Earnshaw.

"I knowed that war sumthin' up this mornin', but for the life o' me I couldn't find out what it war till it war a'most too late. You see, I war scoutin' around the Inglin camp this mornin', when I see'd 'bout fifty o' the fiends o' torture leave camp and p'int that noses this away. I follered 'em to the lake, and thar' I see'd 'em strip o' every thing but their loin-cloths, tie a tomahawk to their waist, and then cover their heads with the skin o' a duck, with feathers, head and all on. This done, the cunnin' pukes waded into the water and submerged themselves to the ears, and I couldn't have told fur the life o' me, if I hadn't knowed it, that thar war an Inglin head in every one o' what seemed a genuine livin' duck. I tell you it war deviilish cunnin' o' the red hounds o' Satan. Anxious to know what they war up to, I kept under kiver and watched 'em, and not until they war a'most onto you did I see their intention. I war then too fur away to git here afore them, so I told ole Vibrator here"—patting his heavy rifle—"to speak out the word o' warnin'. Vibrator spoke. Then I foddered her ag'in, with the avowed purpose o' jerkin' a red-skin outen the lake. I took a dead set—Vibrator let fly her venom, and sure enuff, out popped a red-skin with a hole through his duck's nest.

"I knowed the ball war opened now, and I determined to have a hand in it; so I set out, and if ever a pile o' ole bones flew round Wildwood lake, they war Old Tumult's."

"Indeed, to you, Raynor," said Lionel, it is owing that we are not all slain; but where is Father Ainesley?"

True enough. Reverend Israel Ainsley was missing from the crowd, and no one knew what had become of him, unless he had taken to the forest.

The wounded were now cared for, and litters constructed upon which the dead and wounded were conveyed to the post.

It was sunset ere the women and children had been gathered in from the forest, and even then, two of them could not be found.

The two were Madge Taft and Clara Bryant. As no one had seen them after the beginning

of the attack, nor could give any information of them, all concluded that they must have been captured and carried off, or were lost in the dark mazes of the forest.

Night was coming on apace. A gray mist was rising along the river and over the forest, threatening a dark night. Besides, the air was hot and sultry, and there were many indications of an early autumnal storm. Town Farnsworth shuddered at the thought of Madge and Clara being gone, and no doubt exposed to many dangers, if they were not already suffering the tortures of captivity. Every energy of the young man was aroused, and he became sorely impatient to be off in search of the missing maidens.

But he could do little alone, and the attention of the rest of the settlers was required at the post, to attend to the dead and wounded, and secure the place against a night attack.

Old Tumult, the hunter and trapper, volunteered his services to Town. Town gladly accepted, for, of all the others, there were none he would have selected in preference to this daring scoundrel.

Ere night had fully set in, they had crossed the river, and were threading the trackless aisles of the great woods. They had no hopes of striking the trail of the enemy that night, owing to the darkness. Knowing, however, that if the girls really were taken prisoners, their captors would hurry them away toward the village, the two hoped by a forced march to cut them off from their stronghold; for, once there, there would be little chance for the captives.

Being well acquainted with almost every foot of the country, Old Tumult had no difficulty in keeping his course, and so they were thereby enabled to move quite briskly.

At the cabin of Talbot Taft they stopped to inquire about Madge, but finding no one at home they pushed on.

Leaving Wildwood lake to the left, they pursued a course which would eventually bring them back to the Sioux river, though many miles above the post. As they would have to follow the course of the river after it was reached, they resolved to make part of the journey by water, as Old Tumult knew where a canoe was concealed along the river bank.

Fortune, however, lay in waiting for the two pursuers.

In a little valley not far from the river, gleamed the cheerful light of a camp-fire, and within its radius sat five human forms. Two of these were Madge Taft and Clara Bryant. They sat a little in the background, with hands bound, and heads bowed in grief. The third form was the reverential figure and face of the Reverend Israel Ainesley. He was not bound, but sat before the fire smoking a huge pipe, and exercising a will of perfect freedom. The other two persons were painted and plumed Arapaho Indians!

But a single glance was sufficient to convince the keen-eyed scout and his young companion that Israel Ainesley was in league with the Indians.

Town Farnsworth shuddered with disgust when he realized what a mockery of God Ainesley had proven himself to be; while Old Tumult could scarcely keep down the revengeful wrath that, like an internal volcano, was surging within his breast.

Patience, discretion and self-control, however, were characteristic traits of the old scout, born of necessity. In this lay his great success as an Indian-fighter.

The enemy seemed to have no fear of being pursued, and were quite boisterous and regardless of danger.

"I don't understand it," said Old Tumult, when he and Town had crawled within easy earshot of the camp.

"What?" questioned Town, in an undertone.

"The hilarity o' them 'ere pups. Injuns 're generally more keerful."

"Ah! that's the cause!" whispered Town, on seeing the gray-haired hypocrite, Israel Ainesley, draw from his bosom a flask containing some kind of spirits, place it to his lips, and drink, then pass it on to his companions; "the damnable wretch!"

"Smoke o' torture! wuss then that!" exclaimed the old scout; "the dubble-distilled essence o' the brimstone-pit."

"Well, what's the programme now?" asked Town, growing impatient, as he feasted his eyes upon the sweet, fair face of Madge.

"We mustg it the gals to wunst. It'd be a easy matter, too, to sour their captors' red casses by dashin' in onto 'em full tilt, but, maybe that's several guards skulkin' 'bout, and sich a drive might git us inter trouble; but I'll tell ye what I'll do."

"Well?" said Town, growing more impatient. "I'll string them 'ere two Injins on a thread o' fire-light, and punch the hole with a chunk o' lead spit from the black jaws o' ole Vibrator, then we'll dash in and settle dad Ainesley's hash for 'im."

As he concluded, the old scout drew the ramrod from his rifle, and fixing a screw upon one end of it, inserted it into the barrel.

"You see, lad," he said, twisting the rod around, "I'm goin' to feed a little heavier, fur I calculate one bullet to fix both o' 'em 'ere reds, for ye see they're settin' in range."

In a moment he drew out the bullet from the rifle, and doubled the usual charge of powder. He then rammed the bullet home again, replaced the ramrod, and said:

"Thar, sir, ole Vibrator is so full her sides toot out, and now hear her speak."

Our friends were about a hundred paces from the enemy, who were plainly visible in the light of their camp-fire. The two savages sat side by side, and it was this fact that suggested to the old scout the idea of killing both with the same bullet.

Carefully he raised his long, heavy rifle and fired.

Town started to his feet. The report of the piece sounded like the roar of a cannon, and the young man was sure it had exploded.

Close on the crash of the rifle came the death-wail of the two savages. Then Old Tumult leaped from his covert with a roar that would have done credit to an African gorilla, and shouting to his companion to follow, he dashed into the camp.

Israel Ainesley sat half reclining upon the ground when his two companions fell dead, and for an instant he seemed totally paralyzed by the terrible surprise. But the shout of Old Tumult aroused him, and springing to his feet he attempted to escape into the black shadows of the forest.

But old Tumult had marked the reverend hypocrite's movements, and in an instant he was at Ainesley's heels.

A well-directed blow in the back from the scout's sledge-hammer fist, sent the white-haired man to grass with such velocity, that his heels described a half-circle through the air.

Town Farnsworth sprung to the captives. But for the presence of Clara Bryant, his first love, he would have embraced Madge with a shower of kisses.

Not knowing whether he was friend or foe at first, Madge shrunk from his grasp, a vindictive gleam in her dark eyes. She would have fled into the forest, had not the hand of her lover staid her.

"Fear not—it is me, darling," said the young man.

The gleam of fear and vengeance in her eyes died out, and she yielded to the support of her lover.

In the meantime, Israel Ainesley was struggling to escape from the powerful clutches of Old Tumult, and the confusion they created now drew the attention of Town and the maidens.

Ainesley attempted to gain his feet, but each effort was attended with a blow from the fist of Old Tumult, that sent him back to mother earth again.

"Oh, Mr. Raynor!" cried Madge, "why do you treat Father Ainesley thus? He was a prisoner like us."

"Not a bit o' it, gal, ye blind leetle critter. He's a cussed traitor. Didn't ye see that he wern't bound?"

"But, he gave his word upon the honor of a Christian that he would not escape!" pleaded Clara.

"But he drank from the flask with the Indians, and that are a sure sign o' thar bein' in cahoots," persisted Old Tumult.

"But the Indians compelled him to," said Madge.

At this juncture Ainesley attempted, by a sudden leap to get clear of the old scout, but Old Tumult was on the alert, and thrusting out his long arm and bony hand he clutched the aged hypocrite by the snowy beard in a vise-like gripe.

Ainesley surged backward like a stubborn horse, and losing his balance, fell heavily to the earth. But Old Tumult stood erect, his face elongated with surprise, for in his hand he still clutched the gray whiskers of Ainesley. He held them to the light and saw that they were false whiskers!

Madge turned almost deadly pale, and a smothered cry burst from her lips. Clara involuntarily shrunk toward Town, with fear upon her sweet young face, while the young man himself

seemed terribly agitated, as he gazed upon the fallen man.

"Smoke o' holy torture!" roared Old Tumult, and leaping forward he seized Ainesley and dragged him before the fire, then, in addition to the false whiskers already stripped from the villain's face, he tore from his head the wig of snowy hair.

The angel face of Israel Ainesley was no longer before them, but there was the face of one whom the settlers of Clontarf Post had hung in the forest long weeks before, and whom they supposed dead.

It was the handsome, yet wicked face of the renegade, Dick Sherwood.

CHAPTER VI.

OUTWITTED.

THERE was a momentary silence following the discovery of the existence of Dick Sherwood, in which time the bony fingers of Old Tumult became almost buried in the flesh of the renegade.

"Easy, Tumult, easy!" cried the supposed dead villain, with a nonchalant air. "I'll give up the ghost since you've stripped me of my reverend face and snowy locks."

"Essence of sin!" exclaimed the scout; "mock'er o' God—tool of the devil, I've a notion to pulverize ye to dust!"

"There is no doubt that you and your friends all feel like it, Tumult, since that little hanging affair didn't shut off my wind," said the renegade, with a smile of defiance. "I told the settlers the day they hung me, that when I addressed them again, it would be under different circumstances. So it was. The affair at lake Wildwood is but the beginning of my vengeance upon those who essayed to destroy my life."

"The beginnin' o' yer vengeance!" exclaimed Old Tumult; "hal hal hal! that's a good 'un. I think it's the eend, too, fur when ye 'scape the clutches o' Old Tumult, jist whistle, will ye?"

The bold, wicked, defiant renegade laughed loud and bitterly, then replied:

"It's useless to throw words at one another, Tumult, for my day has not yet come, unless you shoot me upon the spot."

"No, no, Satan," returned Old Tumult: "I will hand you over to the settlers, and let them bid ye 'git ye hence."

"Then bind me hand and foot, or *any* way, so you release your bony claws from my flesh," returned Sherwood, with a shrug of pain.

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared Old Tumult, and he shook the renegade as though he had been a kitten; "why, man, ye've only felt the weight of my hands."

With the assistance of Town, the renegade was securely bound hand and foot, with thongs made of the buck-skin leggings of one of the dead savages.

The renegade glanced toward the two dead Indians with a look of regret, yet when his eyes met those of the two maidens, his features wore no downcast nor defeated look. Dick Sherwood had no fears of death in any form. He was a moral coward as his deeds betokened, but physically speaking, he was utterly reckless in hisunning and daring.

Old Tumult and Town now consulted as to the next steps to be taken. They knew full well that they were in the midst of danger, and that it would be unsafe to remain there during the night. They must either begin their return to the post, or seek some safe retreat. But it became a question, which of these two courses they should pursue.

Suddenly they were startled by a faint rumbling of thunder along the western sky. This at once decided their course, as they discovered that one of those furious autumnal storms was gathering.

"Insomuch as what we can't reach the post to-night, 'specially afore the storm, we'd better take refuge on the Two Islands, in the Sioux river. Thar's a kind o' shanty on one o' 'em, that'll do to perfect yerself and the gals from the storm. As to me, I'm storm-proof, Town."

"It shall all be as you say, Tumult," replied Town; "you know what is best for us."

So preparations were at once made for departure to the Two Islands. Sherwood's feet were unbound, and to prevent his escape in the dark, a strong rope was made of hickory-bark, and one end attached to the renegade's neck—Old Tumult keeping the other end in his hand.

Town, Farnsworth, following the old scout and his prisoner, conducted Madge and Clara through the almost impenetrable gloom of the woods.

An hour's walk brought them to the Little Sioux river, at a point opposite the Two Islands. Old Tumult drew from under some reeds and aquatic plants, a large canoe, that he had concealed there the day previous, and the party at once embarked for the Islands.

The Little Sioux river was not a large stream, but at this point the Two Islands forced the water outward, making the stream fully one hundred yards wide on each side of them.

Two Islands were not over a sixth of an acre each in area. They were divided by a deep, but swift and narrow channel of water, and covered by a dense growth of vegetation and driftwood. A beautiful archery of shrubbery was formed by the foliage of each island growing outward, and interlacing over the channel that separated the islands.

Having landed upon the western Island, Old Tumult drew the canoe partly upon the beach, then led the way carefully toward the interior of the island.

By this time a bank of ominous black clouds had reared its head high up against the western sky, while along its purple, jagged edges, the red lightning ran its old fiery race, making the gloom that followed each flash pitchy black. The dull rumble of thunder had become continuous and sullen, and the whole surrounding had an air of awful solemnity about it.

Clara Bryant covered her eyes to shut out the blinding glare of the lightning, and shuddered when the hot winds touched her pale cheeks. Not so with Madge. A smile, that was almost grim in expression, rested upon her fair face; and her eyes shone with unusual brilliancy. The coming storm filled her breast, seemingly, with some wild joy and secret hope.

Dick Sherwood was silent, but the lightning's glare showed his handsome face aglow with sinful radiance.

Pushing aside some bushes, Old Tumult pointed to a small, cone-shaped structure that stood within a little opening in the center of the island, and said:

"Thar's a little shanty o' mine that I'll do to perfect you and the gals from the storm, Town. Me and this essence o' Satan here can tuck ourselves under a bush and grin it through till mornin'."

"The girls can occupy it," returned Town, "and I will assist you to guard the island, since there is no telling what dangers surround us."

Town conducted the maidens into the little hut, then went out and assisted Old Tumult in binding Dick Sherwood to a sapling that stood within a few feet of the building.

The renegade was so tightly and securely bound, that he fairly groaned with pain.

This done, Old Tumult said:

"Now I'll reconnoiter the island and see that no lurkin' red-skins are 'bout."

He took up his rifle and glided away among the shrubbery like a phantom.

Town stood alone by the renegade. Neither spoke. Town was too absorbed in his own reflections to think of aught but the sweet, fair face of Madge Taft. Dick Sherwood began humming a low, wild song, fixing his eyes upon the hut as he did so.

In a moment all was still again but the wind and thunder. Town noticed that Sherwood still kept his eyes upon the little cone-shaped hut, and so Town himself glanced that way. He started. A gleam of lightning showed to him a human hand protruding from a small opening in the side of the hut. In that mysterious hand was clutched a small, glittering dagger.

"Heavens! what can that mean?" thought Town, "it was not the hand of either of the girls; it was too large. What if an enemy—Ah, what now?"

It was a hasty movement upon the upper side of the island that interrupted him—a movement that produced a sound resembling the threshing of a heavy body through the undergrowth. This sound was followed by a dull thud, then upon the wings of the gathering storm came a wild yell from the lips of Old Tumult, again followed by a triumphant laugh. Then all became still again, and while Town stood trying to gain some solution to the mysterious proceedings, the old scout approached him unseen and touched him upon the shoulder.

Town started.

"This way, lad," said the scout.

Town followed him to the upper margin of the island, when he drew from the forks of a bush and held up before him, a *human scalp*.

"Where did you get that?" asked Town, with a shudder of disgust.

"Thar," replied Old Tumult, pointing to the ground.

Town looked and saw the lifeless body of an Indian lying at his feet.

"I found the red hound skulking on this very island," said Old Tumult.

"And did you slay him?"

"Ya-as. It war a neat job, too; the demon didn't git a chance to screech afore I closed his weazin, and slid his hair off. It looks bloody and wicked to you, lad, but sich is the game. It don't take long to git used to it, either."

At this juncture drops of rain began to fall.

"Go to the shanty, lad, or ye'll git wet," said Old Tumult.

"I am no better than you, Tumult; if it will not hurt you, it will not hurt me."

"Yer plucky, lad; but let us not tarry here too long. We must keep an eye on Sherwood. I brought you here to show you that danger lurked about."

This remark of the old scout reminded Town of the hand he had seen thrust from a crack in the hut, and he at once narrated it to him.

"Smoke o' torture!" exclaimed the scout, turning toward the hut; "come, lad, come."

They hastily retraced their steps toward the cabin; as they neared it, a long, vivid flash of lightning showed that *Dick Sherwood was gone!*

Old Tumult fairly roared with rage and anger.

Town rushed into the hut, excitedly calling on Madge and Clara. But there was no response. He groped about the room and found that it was empty!

Wild with excitement he rushed out into the pelting storm.

"The girls—they, too, are gone, Tumult!" he exclaimed.

"Smoke o' torture! that essence o' Satan has outwitted us after all our precaution—Hark!"

They bent their heads and listened, and from far out upon the water came the imploring cry:

"Save me, Town, save me! help! help!"

It was the voice of Madge Taft.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE HORN OF A DILEMMA.

The rain was now coming down in a perfect torrent. The heavens were one broad sheet of red flame. The thunder rolled incessantly along the storm-girded sky. The winds rumbled wildly and ghostlike through the dark avenues of the forest, and lashed the waters of the river to a foam.

Town Farnsworth stood aghast.

Old Tumult, gazing out upon the river, saw by the lightning's flash, a canoe containing three or four persons making rapidly for the shore.

"Come, Town," he yelled, darting across the island, "and by the gods we will catch that essence o' Satan again."

Town followed him to the shore, where both met with another surprise.

The canoe was gone!

"The gals are lost, Town; Satan and his imps have beaten us. We're bound to stay here now till the storm abates, or Providence sends us a canoe."

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Town, "can we not swim ashore, or construct a raft of driftwood?"

"Not while the river is tossin' so, Town. We could not man a raft now. Even if we could, we might run right into a nest of red-skins that are no doubt watchin' for us this minnit. Be patient, Town; I know it goes hard with yer heart affairs, but patience is the key to success in Injun scoutin'."

The two returned to the hut and went in out of the storm. Town grew almost sick at heart as he sat and listened to the driving rain and howling winds, and realized that the two maidens were exposed to its fury, and he unable to assist them.

Old Tumult became quite calm in consequence of his defeat by Sherwood and his Indians, for he was sure he saw, at least, two Indians with him and his captives in the fleeing canoe.

No rest nor sleep came to the weary bodies and heavy eyes of Old Tumult and Town that night.

The storm seemed to increase in fury each moment, and in order to dispel some of the damp, dismal gloom that seemed pervaded with an atmosphere and foreboding of danger, a fire was lighted within the hut.

The light showed an expression of bitter anxiety and suspense upon the face of young Farnsworth, while the hard, stony features of Old Tumult wore a grim smile denoting doubt and perplexity.

Every few minutes the old scout would go out and reconnoiter the island to make sure that

no lurking red-skins were around. It was far past midnight, when on returning from one of these scouts, that Town, noticed his voice and actions were somewhat agitated, and asked:

"What is the matter, Tumult?"

"Why?"

"Your voice seems agitated."

"Wal, I've diskivered somethin'."

"What?" and Town started up.

"The river is risin' rapidly."

"What of that?"

"In an hour more this 'ere island will be overflowed!"

"My God, Tumult! is it possible?"

"Ya-as. Thar's never been sich a rain in these parts sense the rainy season seven years ago. A half a day's rainin' raised the river then till the Two Islands were completely kivered, sumthin' that has never been done sense."

"What are we to do, if the island is overflowed?" asked Town.

"That's easier axed than answered, lad. The wind is tossin' the seethin' waters up into little mountains—ah! hear 'em dash upon the island! We could never stick to a raft—the waves'd wash us away like lumps o' dirt."

"God in heaven, are we to perish thus?" cried Town, gazing out upon the roaring river.

"Never say die, lad," returned the scout, "there's hope as long as thar's life. We may escape yit."

"How?"

"By climbin' into one o' the large saplin's outside."

"True, true; I had never thought of that. But will not the floating *debris* lodge against the bushes and bear them down?"

"Thar'll be danger, but it's our only resort, Town."

"Then let us hasten to climb the saplings, for already I can hear the water creeping among the undergrowth, like a serpent—there—heavens!"

It was a huge wave that dashed upon the island and rolled half a knee deep over—crept into the cabin and drowned out the fire.

For the next half-minute the two men stood wrapped in total darkness, with the wild seethin' waters rolling around them. Then a prolonged flare of the red lightning revealed the swollen river and the dark wood-land beyond.

Wave after wave dashing against the island warned the old scout and Town of their danger.

Procuring their weapons they climbed into the largest sapling upon the island, and seated themselves securely among the topmost branches. They now found themselves some ten feet above the surface of the island. The tree was of sufficient size and strength to withstand the pressure of the flood in case no heavy weight of floating *debris* lodged against it.

The wind blew so fierce that it required every effort of our two friends to keep their seats in the tree. It was but a few minutes until they were drenched to the skin, though the green foliage around them protected them, in a great measure, from the driving force of the rain.

Half an hour after they had sought their new retreat, a huge wave rolled over the island and swept the hut away. In a few minutes more the Two Islands were entirely submerged, and the wild waves booming over them.

Not until the approach of day did the storm break away.

As the sun rose the rain ceased to fall, the wind went down, the clouds became broken, and in a few minutes the blue vault was sparkling clear and bright.

Our friends breathed an air of relief, but their heads grew dizzy when they gazed on the roaring flood beneath them.

Out upon either side the water had overflowed the river-banks and spread out a hundred yards into the bottom. Its turbulent current was black with floating logs and *debris*.

The tree in which our friends sat quivered under the agitated motion of the water, and ever and anon a floating log would strike it with a force that threatened to bear it down.

Wild birds wheeled and circled over their heads with a startled shriek, as though trying to add new terror to their already trying situation.

Old Tumult ran his eyes along the eastern shore in hopes of seeing some one that he could call to their assistance. But only wave after wave of the great prairie could be seen, rolling away in the great haze of that autumnal morning. He turned his head and gazed toward the wooded shore. He saw a bird soar upward with a startled shriek from that point in the woods where the water had overflowed the bank.

A novice in woodcraft would have paid no

particular attention to so trivial a fact, but Old Tumult saw at once, that the bird had been frightened by something unusual.

In this the old scout was right. The next moment a large canoe, containing half-a-dozen Arapaho Indians, glided swiftly out from among the timber on the inundated shore, and bore down directly toward our friends.

Among the savages, our friends recognized the presence of Dick Sherwood, who, as the canoe glided from among the timber into the main channel of the river, rose to his feet and shouted:

"Surrender, Old Tumult and Town. Farnsworth, or by the heavens above you, and the water beneath, you will be riddled with bullets!"

CHAPTER VIII. THE BETROTHAL.

ALTHOUGH the whites were the common enemy of the Sioux and Arapaho Indians at the time of which I write, a deadly feud existed between the two tribes, growing out of a dispute as to the rightful ownership of a section of territory—abounding with game—since named the Neutral Grounds. The Sioux hunted the Arapaho and the Arapaho hunted the Sioux with the same deadly intent that each hunted the white man.

Being equal in point of number, neither tribe would yield its claim, and it is thus that the opening of our story finds them arrayed against each other.

It is on the morning following the night of storm that we would lead the reader into a temporary encampment of the Arapaho Indians.

The encampment was well located upon a hill-side, and surrounded on all sides by the forest. The lodges were arranged in rows or streets facing a small square. In the center of the square stood the council lodge, and that of the prophet. On each side of the prophet's lodge stood a small one which bore evidence of having been lately placed there.

The storm had cleared away and there were few traces of it remaining on the Indian encampment. The sun was shining brightly, and a cool, pleasant breeze was drifting through the forest.

The Indians were astir quite early. Something of unusual occurrence prevailed in the encampment. The two small tents by the prophet's lodge seemed to be the point of attraction.

Presently the door of the prophet's lodge was thrust aside, and the great prophet made his appearance. He was a *white man*, and no other than Dick Sherwood, the handsome, villainous renegade.

From his lodge the prophet turned to the one at his right, which he entered without ceremony.

The interior of the little lodge was furnished with all the comfort and taste of savage wealth and ingenuity. The floor was covered with soft skins, the walls were hung with tapestry of ornamental buck-skin, while strands of wampum, strands of beads and shells, and curious figures carved from bone and wood adorned the walls and ceiling.

At one side, on a couch of furs, sat a beautiful white woman, from all appearances a captive, though her face wore no look of sadness nor grief. This woman was Madge, the daughter of Talbot Taft, the Indian trader.

"My pretty captive looks none the worse of her night's exposure in the storm," said Sherwood, as he entered her tent, with an air of mock politeness.

Madge looked up at the renegade and smiled scornfully.

"I am feeling quite well, and none the worse of my exposure," she replied, in a defiant tone.

"I am glad to hear it, Miss Taft," the villain replied; "perhaps we can come to some definite terms, as to the future. I think I will have no trouble in bringing that modest little violet, Clara Bryant, to a *pleasant* reconciliation."

"Just so," mockingly returned Madge.

The villain continued:

"However, Miss Taft, it is likely that you have great influence with Miss Bryant, and if you will go to her, and induce her—make her believe that her only salvation lies in her becoming my lawful wife, you will be set at liberty. If she will consent to marry me to-morrow, I will send for the missionary, Father Jules, and have him perform the ceremony. Then, with a certificate of our marriage in my pocket my mission will be ended, and I will bid farewell to this heathen country and return to

the East the heir to a vast fortune. What say you?"

Madge smiled scornfully, yet strangely, as she replied:

"I will do anything to get rid of your odious presence. I will lay your proposition before Clara, and then she can do as she sees fit. But were it me, I'd see you burning before I would submit to wed you."

The renegade laughed long and loudly, then said:

"Remember, *Miss Taft*"—laying a marked emphasis upon the 'Miss'—"as I told you last night, as soon as Clara is my wife, and I have Father Jules's certificate of our marriage in my pocket, she shall be set at liberty. As her husband, I will press no further claims upon her. All I want is something to show my right to—well, you know what—the Golden Horn estate."

Madge arose to leave the lodge.

"I will go at once and see Clara," she said.

"Then I will wait your return," said Sherwood.

Madge went out into the little tent where Clara Bryant was a prisoner. She found the maiden weeping, with face pale and sorrowful.

"Oh, Clara!" cried Madge, "I have come to you with what I hope will be good news."

Clara looked quickly up, a light of hope in her tearful eyes.

"Has he decided to set us free—to allow us to return home?" she asked.

"On certain conditions, dear Clara."

"What are they?"

"That you, sweet Clara, become his wife."

"Sherwood's wife!" gasped Clara.

"Yes."

"Never, never, Madge!" and there was a momentary flash of defiance in her eyes, but it soon died away.

"Listen, Clara," said Madge, "the moment that you are wed to Sherwood, we will both be set at liberty. He has promised to force no claims upon you as your husband."

"Then why does he wish to marry me?"

"Out of pure revenge. You know he is a desperate character, Clara."

"Revenge upon me?"

"No; but upon Town, Farnsworth, whom he hates above all else upon earth, and whom he believes loves you."

Madge looked closely into the face of her companion as she spoke, and saw a crimson flush mount to her cheeks.

"But, you know, Madge, that Town does not love me."

"Why should I know, Clara?"

"Because Town loves you."

"You surprise me, Clara; however, Sherwood believes that Town loves you, and he has set his wicked heart on marrying you for revenge."

"Oh, Madge! I wish I was as brave and fearless as you are, then I would know how to decide. You must advise me, Madge. Your judgment will dictate the proper course for me to pursue."

Madge's eyes shone brightly.

"Clara," she said, softly, "although Dick Sherwood is a desperate character, I believe there is some honor about him; and I further believe that if you marry him, he will set us free. Of course, when we are free, we will declare your marriage a forced one, and that will make it null and void, though the wretch does not know it; so he will have no claim upon you after all, and it will be such a clever joke on him."

Clara smiled sadly, and her lips quivered as, half in doubt, she asked:

"Then you advise me to marry him?"

"It is our only hope, Clara."

"Then I must consent."

"Then I will see him and tell him. If you agreed to his propositions, he said he would have the wedding take place to-morrow."

Madge left the tent and returned to her own, where Sherwood was awaiting her.

"Well," said the renegade, as she entered.

"It is all right," returned Madge, and the shadow of a wicked smile hovered around her mouth.

Sherwood laughed one of his cold, devilish laughs.

Then he clapped his hands and cried:

"Vengeance! vengeance! my sweet Cecil, and a long life at the Golden Horn!"

And strange though it was, Madge clapped her hands and laughed too.

In a moment Sherwood continued:

"Yes, sweet Annette, my mission—my secret mission in the West will soon be ended, and then for the Golden Horn! But, I must have

one man's life before I go, the life of Old Tumult, the hunter. I could never rest easy—not even in the grave—without revenge upon that giant. I know he is shut up on one of the Two Islands, if he and his young friend, Farnsworth, have not been washed away by the flood. Ha! ha! ha! that escape from the island last night with the two maidens was nicely made, fair Annette!"

The villain went on with his talk, like one speaking to himself, or an imaginary person. He seemed totally unconscious of Madge's presence.

"You are surely out of your wits, great prophet of the Arapahoes," said the trader's daughter, sneeringly.

"No, no; only indulging in a bit of self-communion, Miss Taft," he replied; "but by the gods, I will have the life of Old Tumult! To-morrow Clara shall be my wife, and then for the Golden Horn and long life, my sweet Cecil?"

As the handsome villain concluded his wild soliloquy, he turned and went out of the lodge.

When she found herself alone, Madge threw herself upon the couch of skins, and burst into a fit of hysterical laughter which ended in an outburst of tears.

Dick Sherwood, burning with a desire for revenge upon Old Tumult, and conscious of his inability to cope with him in physical strength, selected five of the best warriors in the tribe and set off for Two Islands, determined to capture the old scout at all hazards, dead or alive. Besides, the warriors that accompanied him were stimulated by a handsome reward, offered by their chief, for the scalp of their most terrible enemy, Old Tumult, the hunter and scout.

CHAPTER XI.

A STARTLING SURPRISE.

As the voice of Sherwood rolled across the water in his demand for the surrender of Old Tumult and Town, the old scout burst into a roar of laughter that fairly shook the tree in which he was perched; then, in a tone peculiar to his powerful lungs, he requested the renegade to go to—that very warm region prepared for the wicked.

The enemy were above them, where they could avail themselves of the force of the current, and no sooner did they hear the old scout's reply, than they began bearing down toward them at a rapid speed.

Our friends could see that the enemy were armed with rifles, but, as they did not fire upon them, they knew the distance was too great for the range of a common firearm, they—the enemy—being over two hundred yards above them.

"Death is a dead certainty with us now, Tumult," said Town.

"Things look kinder scaly, lad, but I'm thinking in that 'ere essence o' Satan has miscalculated our situation; or else they don't know as how old Vibrator here can flip lead—that we've got rifles, too."

"But the rain has made my rifle perfectly useless, Tumult, and my ammunition is soaking wet," said Town, regretfully.

"Vibrator is all right. I didn't furgit to keep her muzzle down and her nipple dry. My powder is in a waterproof horn, and now I'll see if I can't check the speed o' them 'ere critters afore they git in range for their bird-pickers."

As he concluded, the old scout thrust his rifle through the foliage, took a deliberate aim and fired. Had a torpedo exploded under the advancing canoe, it could not have caused greater consternation than did the shot fired by Old Tumult. It was wholly unexpected by the enemy. Sherwood had convinced the savages that there was nothing to fear from the whites—that their firearms were rendered useless by the rain. But when one of their number fell dead—shot through the head with a half-ounce ball—all their savage anticipations of a pair of scalps fled, and turning their canoe shoreward, they fled equally as fast.

Old Tumult, with all the lion force of his lungs, gave vent to a triumphant, defiant yell, and a derisive, mocking laugh, that made the very blood of Dick Sherwood's veins leap hot with rage and burn with resentment.

"That'll be apt to set the hounds o' Satan red-hot," said the old scout, as the enemy disappeared in the flooded timber; "and we've got to keep a close look-out, fur they'll try every way that their cunnin' brain kin invent to git our skulps."

The new danger stimulated rather than depressed the spirit of our friends, and they began to view their situation in a rather novel light; but how long this would last was a question of doubt. True, the water was falling fast, still it

would be several hours before they could set foot upon the island; and without great precaution, in that time the enemy might bring to bear upon them some means that would dislodge them. The only difficulty that they experienced in their elevated retreat was the numbness of their limbs, occasioned by inactivity and the cramped position they were compelled to retain.

Town drew the wet charge from his rifle, and reloaded with powder from Old Tumult's horn, and thus in a few minutes he had his piece ready for use.

Something like an hour had passed after the defeat of Sherwood, when the attention of our flood-bound friends was attracted by a huge raft of driftwood coming down the river. It was some four hundred yards away when first discovered, and although a number of such rafts of flood-collected debris had passed down the river since daylight, this was the first one that attracted unusual attention from the keen eyes of Old Tumult.

"Thar's deviltry up, boy," said the old scout; "that 'ere raft o' wood and sich, looks a leetle suspicious."

"What do you judge from?" asked Town.

"Wal, thar's too many logs piled on top o' one another; and then you see thar's some brush and sich piled onto the logs in a kind o' a careless way, it's true; but I would not be afraid to bet there war Ingins among that 'ere driftwood."

"If there is, we will give them a chunk or two of cold lead," said Town, fixing his eyes upon the raft.

"Ah—they're too sharp fur that, lad. They're layin' ahind the logs—mebbe half buried in the water—and jist as soon as they git close enough, we'll hear, if we don't feel, cold lead rattlin' round us. Things begin to look scaly, boy, fur us, or I'm no judge."

The two men felt no little uneasiness for the next ten minutes as to the real character of the raft. If there were Indians about it, as Old Tumult had no doubt but there were, they were so hidden among the logs and bushes as to defy all efforts of discovery, while at the same time the whites would be exposed to the rifles of the hidden enemy.

They could do nothing but watch and wait, while the raft continued to drift slowly toward them. It was about a hundred yards away when Old Tumult was sure he saw the head of a savage peering over a log, and, to convince himself as to whether such really was the case, he raised his rifle and fired at the object.

But the scout never knew whether or not it was an Indian's head, nor what had been the effect of his shot, for, simultaneous with the report of the rifle, the raft dropped into a strong, surging eddy—swung swiftly around a number of times, and then, as if a magazine had exploded in its midst, it flew apart—every log became separated from each other by the circling force of the water; and there, in the midst of the whirling, rolling logs and debris, were a half a dozen Indians, struggling desperately with the waves.

Old Tumult burst into a roar of laughter when he discovered this providential misfortune to the savages.

As the scout had mistrusted, the red-skins had secreted themselves among the logs and debris; and, but for the parting of the raft in the eddy, and the sudden precipitation of the coming foe into the seething waters, it is very probable that our friends would have been shot down in another moment.

As fast as Old Tumult could load and fire upon the struggling, panic-stricken enemy, he did so with telling effect. And those of the savages that escaped his deadly aim, were overpowered by the waves and swept away.

Again our friends had nothing, for the moment, to fear from the Arapahoes.

A silence ensued.

Town was thinking of Madge and Clara, while Old Tumult was silently wondering what course the enemy would next resort to, to dislodge them from their retreat.

Suddenly they were startled by the sharp twang of a horn.

The sound came from the eastern shore. They glanced in that direction and discovered a horseman moving along the shore toward the north.

They recognized him at the first glance.

It was Rollo, the Boy Ranger.

Old Tumult placed his hat upon the muzzle of his gun and waved it above his head, shouting at the top of his lungs.

The young ranger drew rein and answered the scout's shout by a blast from his horn and a waving of his scarlet cap.

"Ay, Rollo, my lad," called the scout, "it's

rather a cramped condition we're in, and all fur want o' help."

The young ranger was not over two hundred yards away, and had no difficulty in catching the scout's words.

"Then you shall want no longer, old friend," replied the ranger; "I will assist you at once."

"But how kin ye, my lad?" asked the scout.

"I will hasten up the river to King's Ford and get the old ferryman's boat," returned the youth.

"That'll do, my gallant boy; jist run the boat under this 'ere tree and we'll be ready to drop down into it."

With a wave of his scarlet cap, the ranger dash away on his mission. It was about three miles to what was known as King's Ford, where an old half-breed by the name of King had built a ferry-boat, for the purpose of transferring the loaded teams of settlers from one side to the other during high waters.

Our friends did not expect the return of the ranger with the boat under two hours, but scarcely an hour had elapsed when, to their surprise, they saw the youth with the boat put around the bend in the stream above, not over three hundred yards distant.

It is necessary that we should here give a brief description of the ferry-boat, for reasons which will be made known hereafter.

It was about twenty feet in length, by half that length in width, and constructed on the principle of a large canoe; then, in order to make it more convenient for loaded teams, a slab floor, or deck, was laid across the top from side to side, thus forming a hold about two feet deep beneath the slab deck. A pair of sweeps and a tiller constituted the propelling and guiding apparatuses of the craft. At the prow of the boat was an opening or hatchway, about two feet square, leading into the hold. This opening was covered with a stout slab in which was fixed a ring and staple for raising.

Old Tumult hailed the approach of the ranger with a wild shout, and then they began to prepare to leave their elevated retreat.

Rollo had no need of the sweeps. The force of the current carried the boat along quite rapidly, and he had only to stand at the tiller and keep the boat in the proper course to pass over the inundated island.

When the boat was within fifty yards of our friends, Old Tumult shouted:

"Ye made a purty quick trip up the ford, lad."

"It would have been, had I went to the ferry, but the fact of it is, I found the boat stranded about a mile above here."

"Possible!" exclaimed the scout, while Town peered through the foliage at the ranger with a puzzled expression upon his face.

"Yes," returned the youth, bending slightly upon the tiller; "the flood had washed it from its mooring and drifted it down-stream about two miles, where it lodged, and where I found it."

"Wal, it's all luck—bear to the left, lad, bear to the left—let the prow strike the tree midways—bear hard—there—smoke of tortures!"

The exclamation was caused by the ferry-boat striking the tree, or sapling, with such sudden force that our two friends were nearly shaken from its branches. However, the boat came to a stand, and the next moment our friends stood upon its deck.

Old Tumult fairly danced with joy, while Town was compelled to rub his limbs vigorously in order to restore the circulation.

Old Tumult pushed the boat clear of the tree, and the next moment it was slowly veering off toward the western shore.

The scout and the young ranger entered into a conversation, and in a moment the latter was in possession of all the facts that placed our two heroes in the predicament in which he found them.

Rollo then gave the scout and Town some joyful news of the whereabouts of the two captives, Madge Taft and Clara Bryant. He had seen them taken to the village of the prophet, while scouting thereabouts, and but for the superiority in number of the savages he would have attempted their rescue. This was joyful news to the scout and Town, not because the maidens were captives in the Indian village, but to know they had survived the peril of the night's storm.

"Did the captives seem much depressed in spirit?" asked Town.

"Miss Taft," returned the ranger, glancing toward the shore as if to conceal the smile that passed over his dark, handsome face, "seemed very sad and downcast, when she was conducted by where I was lying concealed in the undergrowth."

A sigh, that deepened almost into a groan escaped Town's lips.

"I tell ye what, Town," said Old Tumult, "I know it goes plaguy tuff with a feller when he's mixed up in a heart-affair with a purty gal, and that gal's a prisoner in the hands o' a pack o' red-skins. I know it goes tuff, fur I've been that, Town."

Rollo, the Boy Ranger, smiled again, as he carefully noted his course and moved the tiller accordingly.

A silence, broken only by the swash of the water, ensued.

Old Tumult was thinking of the past; Town, of Madge, while the ranger, apparently plunged into mental oblivion, began whistling softly.

Suddenly, as if moved by a single and intuitive impulse the old scout and Town, glanced at Rollo. The eyes of the ranger were fixed upon the forward part of the boat with a strange expression shining from their dark depths.

Again, as if moved by some unknown impulse, the eyes of Old Tumult and Town, sought the object of the ranger's attention, and to their horror and surprise they beheld the slab over the hatchway pushed aside, and a giant savage leap from the hold of the boat onto the deck, followed by another, until four of the painted demons stood before them, their faces aglow with diabolical triumph!

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE CONFLICT.

OLD TUMULT and Town, recoiled before the visionary blow that the sudden and undreamed-of appearance of the four savages produced upon them. But, it was only for a moment that their presence of mind seemed to desert them.

Each of the savages clutched a tomahawk in his hand, and our friends at once saw the advantage of the foe in weapons as well as number.

Rollo did not relinquish his post at the tiller, but, for some reason, headed the boat, at once, directly down the stream.

Town, as he mechanically glanced from one to the other of his friends, noticed the saber dangling at the ranger's side, and foreseeing its superiority in a hand-to-hand conflict, reached forward and snatched it from the scabbard.

Then he made a quick spring toward a savage, and, with a desperate lunge, drove the slender blade to the heart of the foe.

Up to this instant the savages stood facing the whites, without making a single demonstration. It was quite evident that the cunning demons had expected their sudden and unexpected presence to completely terrify the whites to a bloodless submission. In this, however, they were sorely surprised, for, at the same instant that Town, ran one of them through with Rollo's saber, Old Tumult dropped his rifle and dealt the second one a blow with his huge fist, that sent him whirling overboard into the river. Then, with a roar equal to that of a maddened lion, he leaped at the third savage, while Town, engaged the fourth.

The savage with whom Old Tumult grappled hand-to-hand, was the scout's equal in every respect. If there was any difference in weight, it was in favor of the deep, wide-chested Arapaho. In so close a grapple, the savage was compelled to drop his tomahawk, and then, in endeavoring to draw his knife, it slipped from his fingers and fell to the deck.

Thus deprived of all the weapons save those that nature gave them, the two giant enemies "climbed."

The contest at once became desperate. It was a battle of life and death.

Town, Farnsworth, brave as a lion and quick as a flash, soon gained the advantage over his foe and ran him through with the saber. As he rolled dead at his feet, the young man turned to assist the old scout, but at that instant the two giant combatants, locked in each other's embrace, staggered backward and rolled through the hatchway into the boat's hold.

"My God!" exclaimed Town, rushing to the opening and looking down. But he saw nothing of the combatants. Back in the hold, two feet from the hatchway, it was dark as midnight. Besides, to render the situation more critical, there were several inches of water in the hold.

Town, started up—his brain burning with wild excitement. The death of his friend seemed inevitable.

He turned inquiringly toward Rollo, who, as yet, had never left the tiller. What must have been his surprise and consternation to see the ranger stoop and assist on board the savage that Old Tumult had knocked overboard at the beginning of the conflict.

"Rollo! Rollo!" cried Town, "what means

this?" and, springing forward, he severed the head of the savage almost from the body, with a single sweep of the ranger's saber.

"Heavens, Farnsworth! I must be crazy—helping the red demon on the boat to slay me," he cried; "'tis well you came; I was so excited that I did not know what I was doing."

There was a strange light in the ranger's eyes, and a strange intonation in his voice.

Town, regarded him for a moment with suspicion, and he had it in his mind to accuse him of being a traitor, when his thoughts were drawn away by the desperate struggling going on in the hold below.

Town, would have rushed down to assist his old friend, had he not been afraid of assisting the wrong one, in the darkness that prevailed therein. He could do nothing but wait and listen, and hope for the best. He could hear them rolling and struggling in the water; he could hear their heavy, labored breathing, and the dull thud and crash of their fists—even feel the vibratory shock of each blow, and the dull thumping of their bodies against the under side of the deck.

Now and then all would become quiet and still, as though no life was there below.

Town, felt a chill of terror creep over him, as he thought that the savage may have slain his friend, and was then creeping with the silence of a shadow toward the hatchway, to leap out and murder him. He was relieved of these fears, however, when the struggling, pounding and groaning would begin again with renewed vigor.

The dipping of the canoe showed that the combatants were first upon one side and then the other. A hollow moan now and then came from the dark pit followed by a gurgling shriek or strangling cry.

To Town, it sounded like the struggling of two demons away down in the bowels of the earth.

For fully half an hour the struggling continued, then all became hushed in a deathlike silence—the conflict had ended.

Town, and Rollo held their breath in anxious suspense, and listened.

But all was silent as the grave below.

"My God, Town! I fear our friend is dead!" cried Rollo.

"If one is dead, both are," replied Town.

"Perhaps it would be well for us to look, Town."

Town, went to the opening and gazed down into the hold. But he saw nothing. At the further end of the boat, where the combatants were last heard, it was black as night. He listened again, but heard nothing. He then called the name of his friend—repeated the call, but still there was no response.

He started up with an expression of deep sadness upon his face.

"They have slain each other, Rollo," he cried.

Rollo uttered an exclamation of sorrow, as he bent upon the tiller.

"What will we do with the scout's body?" he finally asked.

"We must remove it from the hold and give it a Christian burial. The savage's carcass we will bury in the river."

"Hist!—ha-rk!"

It was Rollo who uttered the injunction of silence, in a tone scarcely above a whisper.

"What is it?" queried Town.

"Didn't you hear a movement below?"

"In the hold?"

"Yes."

"Ah—then I did—one of them is not dead!"

The young settler took up one of the fallen savage's tomahawks, and advanced softly toward the hatchway, saying to Rollo in a whisper:

"It is the savage that lives, else Old Tumult would have answered me. The red demon is waiting for a chance to spring out and murder me. I will watch for him here."

"It may not be," said Rollo.

"Time will soon tell."

The two became silent, and listened and watched. An awful anxiety came upon them. One of the combatants was alive. They could hear him dragging himself through the water toward the opening.

My readers can better imagine the awful suspense of the two young men than I can describe it. A moment seemed an hour. They were sure they could hear their own hearts beating and feel the hot blood leaping through their veins. Their eyes, almost starting from their sockets, became fixed upon the opening.

Suddenly a shadow appeared within it. Something arose in the young men's throats that seemed to choke them.

Slowly, quite slowly, the shadow was follow-

ed by a tuft of dark hair, the shaven skull, the low, dark brow, the glaring eyes, the painted, lacerated face of the savage giant!

CHAPTER XI.

THE RESULT OF THE FIGHT.

A CHILL of horror crept over the frame of Town, Farnsworth as he saw the bloody face and lacerated shoulders of the savage appear slowly from the hatchway. He shrunk back from the hideous form as from an apparition.

The face of the savage wore a ghastly expression—the eyeballs protruded from their sockets till they rested upon the cheeks—the jaws stood apart and the tongue protruded from the mouth, which was filled with blood and foam.

Clutching the tomahawk in a firmer grasp, Town, advanced toward the savage; but, at the same instant, the form of the giant warrior shot out of the hold and fell limp and motionless in death upon the deck.

Then, up through the hatchway, popped the head and shoulders of Old Tumult, the picture of dolefulness and woe, his face convulsed and his sides shaking in a roar of triumphant laughter.

After all he had proved the victor, and had pushed the body of his fallen enemy through the hatchway in order to work a surprise upon his two friends, who, he learned from their conversation, had come out victors with the savages above. But, the old scout bore many a mark of the conflict. His face and neck were fearfully lacerated, and the few locks of yellow hair that were permitted to remain on his head, clung about his face and neck wet and sadly. His clothes were nearly all torn from his body, and his back bore many a red furrow where the sharp nails of the giant had plowed.

Town, stood speechless with happy disappointment.

Something like a scowl passed over Rollo's face.

Old Tumult was the first to speak:

"Ay, lads!" he cried, "had thar been a leetle smell o' brimstone down thar in that dark hold, I could have convinced myself that I was tusslin' with the devil away down in the black pit."

Town, and Rollo laughed at the scout's coolness of speech, rendered slightly ludicrous by his doleful appearance.

"If you could come out victor in a life-struggle with Satan, as with this savage, you'd be equal to Christian, the Pilgrim," said Town.

"Zactly," returned the old scout, and having picked up his rifle from the deck, he related his adventures below. When he had succeeded in slaying his foe, he listened and learned from their talk that Town, and Rollo's fears had been aroused as to the result of the conflict. A practical joke was thereby suggested to his mind, and he proceeded to carry it into execution by thrusting the body of the savage through the hatchway.

Washing the blood from his hands and face, and bathing his many, but not very serious, wounds and bruises, the scout declared his readiness for further business. Thereupon, Rollo headed the boat shoreward again, and in a few minutes the bank was reached.

Old Tumult and Town, went ashore, but Rollo remained on board.

"Why, ain't you a-goin' with us?" asked Old Tumult.

"I can not. I must return for my horse on the other side of the river," replied the ranger.

"Oh—'zactly," responded the scout; "I'd forgotten that you hed a hoss."

"And I am very sorry that we are to lose so valuable a friend," said Town.; "I hope we will be able to repay you some time for to-day's invaluable service."

"I want nothing," replied the ranger, "and if you will appoint a place of meeting, I will join you in your efforts to rescue the maidens when I get my horse and cross the river."

"That's a fair offer," said Town., "and we'll be glad to have your services, which are worth half a dozen men on an Indian trail."

"Ya-as, that's what the red-skin thought t'other day when I spread his nose all over his face with my fist," returned the scout, with a humorous chuckle; "but how'll the head o' the Devil's Staircase do fur a meetin'-p'int?"

"The place, exactly," returned the young ranger; "but as it is past noon now, it may be far into the night before I get there."

"Wal, we'll wait thar till ye come," said the scout.

"Till then, good-by," said the young ranger.

They separated. The scout and Town, turned their faces westward and set off through the

forest. Had they, however, crept back and kept a watch upon the movements of the young ranger, they would have seen sufficient of his proceedings to have justified them in sending a bullet through his heart. But, "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PIPE OF PEACE.

OLD TUMULT felt none the better of his ferry-boat adventure. In fact, he felt quite sore, but the consciousness of having defeated the enemy, proved a radical mental relief, and repaid him, in one sense of the word, for the bruises he had received.

Hunger was the next enemy with which they had to contend, for the want of fire. Game was around them in abundance, but they had no way of cooking it. Continuing on, however, they were so fortunate as to come across the remnants of a deserted camp-fire. This was at once replenished with fuel, and soon a savory slice of venison was roasting before it.

After a hearty meal, they continued on toward the Indian village. They proceeded quite leisurely, for their late adventure had nearly exhausted them; besides there was no need of haste, as they had plenty of time to reach the Devil's Staircase before night.

As they moved along, Town. became silent and thoughtful, and Old Tumult wary and cautious. The latter finally noted a curious expression upon his companion's face, and asked:

"What is it, Town.?"

"What is what?" queried Town., apparently perplexed.

"That makes yer face twitch so."

Town. laughed, as the color came to his face. The fact of it was, he was thinking of the pretty Madge Taft, but to evade a direct answer, he said:

"Well, I was just thinking—thinking whether I had better reveal the suspicion that has arisen in my mind lately."

"Certainly, tell it, by all means," exclaimed Tumult.

Town. stepped nearer the scout and said:

"I solemnly believe that Rollo is a traitor—that he knew of the savages being concealed in the ferry-boat."

The old scout at once grew restless; he looked at Town.—shifted his rifle to the other shoulder, and said:

"What makes ye think so, Town.?"

"His actions during the fight on the boat—he never lifted a hand to help us, but directly I caught him assisting on board the boat, the savage that you knocked overboard."

"Didn't he 'pologize when ye ketched him?"

"He plead excitement."

"Ugh—hump!" ejaculated Old Tumult. "Wal, Town., as to that lad bein' a traitor, we think alike; and thar's sumthin' else that I've diskivered 'bout him, and what sp'ises me is that you haven't see'd it yerself."

"What is it?" asked Town.; "all questions are fair."

"You'd shoot me, Town., if I'd tell you."

Town. was surprised by this blunt remark.

"I will give my word as security for your life," he said.

"Then I'll tell it. Rollo, the Ranger—" he began, but broke abruptly off in consequence of the angry crack of a rifle, and the "whizz" of a bullet in close proximity to his head.

"Tarnal furies!" he exclaimed, as his keen eyes swept the surrounding forest for the enemy that had fired the shot; "what a bad shot that war. Come, lad, tramp quick—tramp lively!"

The old scout quickened his steps and lengthened his strides, until Town. was scarcely able to keep pace with him.

The young settler wondered why he beat so hasty a retreat in the face of a single foe as the shot proved. To him it looked as though the indomitable courage of the old scout was deserting him. However, Old Tumult seemed to have read his thoughts, and said:

"I don't fight Ingins like every ole hunter generally does, Town.—"

"No, I see you run from them sometimes."

"That's logic in it, too, lad; now you see if we'd 'a' stopped and went to huntin' fur the red that fired the shot, he'd 'a' shot us down. By runnin' he'll think we're scart, and out he'll dive from his nest and take arter us. Then's the time to turn and let him have it; I think the ijee's not to be sneezed at."

And so thought Town., as the scout whirled suddenly around, threw his rifle to his face and fired. Simultaneous with the crack of the gun, a savage death-cry rung out through the forest aisles—thus proving how effectual was the old

scout's plan of drawing an enemy from ambush.

The two now continued their course without further molestation.

Cautiously skirting the Indian village, they reached the Devil's Staircase, two miles beyond where they had agreed to meet the ranger.

The Devil's Staircase was an almost perpendicular declivity, leading down a narrow defile into a low plain or valley. The forest around it was of dense growth, and in broad daylight its shadows lay thick as the gloom of summer twilight.

When this point was reached it lacked two hours of night, and as the scout and Town. could do nothing until then, they concluded to conceal themselves, and await its cover before making any further move.

A retreat, flanked upon three sides by jutting rocks, was selected by the two men, who at once threw themselves in an attitude of repose. As an enemy could approach them only in front, it required no extra vigilance to guard their position, and they made themselves quite at ease.

After discussing the incidental topics of their situation and future prospects, Town. said:

"Then you believe the Boy Ranger is in league with the Indians, eh, Tumult?"

"Ya-as, with the Arapahoes. They're mean enuff to league with Satan. I tell ye, lad, arter all there's more honor in the Sioux tribe than enmy other on this terrestrial ball."

"None of them are to be trusted far," said Town.

"That depends upon circumstances. The Sioux won't consort with every white cut-throat that seeks their protection from the laws of the States."

"I will frankly admit that there is more honor and manhood in a Sioux Indian than a white renegade like Dick Sherwood. But I cannot imagine why one so young, handsome and intellectual as Rollo is, should be a traitor to his own people—and such a secret traitor, too."

"Ay, lad," cried the scout, "thar's many a deep, dark mystery that the world'll never know enny thing 'bout."

"Then, hereafter we can keep an eye upon Rollo's movements, and see if our suspicions of him are correct."

"That's true, boy; but unless he comes afore night it'll be too late, or I'm no judge."

"What do you mean, Tumult?"

"This: if the ranger comes here arter dark, it will be with a troop of Arapahoes at his heels to capture us."

"I can not understand your reason for thinking so."

"I'll tell you, lad; thar's some devilish plot coming to a crisis, and Dick Sherwood and Rollo are at the bottom of it all."

"Well, where's your proof?"

"That fust attempt to kidnap Miss Bryant: the meetin' affair at Wildwood lake; the kapter of the two gals; the affair at Two Islands, and the ferry-boat surprise, are all the proof that I want," said Old Tumult; "and, furthermore, our carcasses are mixed up in it some way 'r other; and now mind, unless we look sharp, that 'ere boy'll play the deuce with us to-night."

"You really surprise me, Tumult."

"And I could surprise ye more if I'd tell o' the diskivery that I've made."

"Why not tell it?"

The scout was silent. Town. repeated the question.

"You'd feel more like shootin' me than thankin' me fur the infurment," returned Old Tumult.

Town. laughed, though his mind was perplexed.

"Howsumever," continued the old scout, "I might as well tell it, fur you're bound to know it sooner or later. The fact is, this mornin' I diskivered that Rollo, the ranger, and—"

Here he broke abruptly off, for a shadow fell across his vision. He seized his rifle and sprung to his feet, and found himself confronted by a tall, powerful Sioux Indian, whom he at once recognized as Mahaska, chief of the Sioux tribe!

Tumult at once placed himself in an attitude of defense, but a sign from the chief put at rest all fears of an encounter. He showed that his presence there was fraught with peace and friendship, although Old Tumult had always known him as an enemy.

Our friends recognized the chief's token of friendship by dropping their rifles and folding their arms across their breasts.

"Good!" ejaculated the chief; "the great Tumult and his friend know that Mahaska comes with friendship in his breast."

"You bet, chief," returned the scout, extending his large, bony hand; "it's hard to mistake that jolly twinkle in yer eye—it means, no skulps wanted."

"The great Tumult is wise. His tongue is straight. His arm is strong. His eyes are keen. His aim is deadly, but Mahaska knows he will not strike a friend."

"You're right there, great chief," returned the scout, determined to pay an equal amount of compliments; "I know yer a brave chief, a splendid feller, a brillunt scholar, a good jedge o' whisky, and a brick o' a boy in general."

The chief reared himself proudly. Although he did not fully understand the English of the scout's complimentary remarks, he took it all as something very fine.

"The great Tumult and Mahaska," the chief began, "are friends now. Mahaska was concealed in the brush there, when the white men come here to talk. He heard them speak well of the Sioux, and bad of the Arapaho and his white ally. The worls of the great scout were words of wisdom and truth, and they have sunk deep into the breast of Mahaska. He will never forget them, and here offers to smoke the pipe of peace with the great Tumult and his friend."

"That's business, chief," replied Tumult, with a sly wink at Town.; "bring on your pipe o' peace, and a 'bottle o' friendship,' if you've got it. I promise that my people will never harm the Sioux, if the Sioux will keep on his side o' the creek, and furever bury the hatchet o' discord and enmity."

"Mahaska pledges the friendship of his people."

"Then my people will not harm the Sioux. They seek the good will o' all. But they are brave and will give blow fur blow. When the Sioux attacks, the white will defend."

As the scout concluded, Mahaska gave utterance to a low, peculiar chirrup, when there was heard a dull fluttering like many wings, and the next instant fully three score Indian warriors burst from the forest shadows and gathered around our friends and their chief.

A chill of distrust passed over our friends at sight of the painted and plumed warriors, but they allowed no look to betray their inward emotion to the red-skins.

Mahaska made a brief speech to his warriors and informed them that they were about to smoke the pipe of peace with the whites.

This bit of news was received with a savage yell that jarred very discordantly upon the tympanum of our friends.

Old Tumult nudged Town. and grinned broadly."

A circle was now formed. Mahaska drew from a greasy tobacco-pouch a large, dirty calumet which he loaded and lit. He then took a few whiffs, and handed it to Old Tumult, who, in turn, "drew" very lightly on the obnoxious "seal of peace."

In a few minutes the pipe had "swung around the circle," and was lodged in its greasy receptacle, and peace between the whites and Sioux was declared.

However, Old Tumult knew the Indian's nature too well to put implicit confidence in him, and he would not have been surprised had they broken their promise of peace ere the obnoxious taste of the "pipe of peace," was out of his mouth.

The warriors now gathered around Old Tumult and gazed upon him with no little curiosity, for in days past, he had been a constant terror to them, and had ornamented his girdle with the scalps of many of their friends.

After having discussed various topics incidental to the treaty, Mahaska asked:

"Mahaska"—he always spoke of himself in the third person—"heard the great Tumult say that the young white ranger was in league with the Arapaho. He speaks the truth. The ranger is the friend of the Arapaho—the enemy of the Sioux and the pale-face."

"How does Mahaska know?" questioned the scout.

"His scouts have been in the heart of the Arapaho village. They saw the ranger there, and heard him talking with the white prophet. When the Boy Ranger comes here to meet the great Tumult and his friend, when the sun goes down, let them beware, for he will bring many warriors with him whose hearts burn for their blood."

His own ideas of Rollo's treachery at once convinced Tumult that there was more truth than fiction in the chief's warning.

"We'll be on the watch for the young rascal," said the scout, "when he comes to-night."

"Can the great scout be on the watch for the

many warriors that will follow him like shadows?"

"Not if more'n six comes at a time," replied Tumult.

"Then Mahaska and his warriors will hide in the forest, and if the Arapahoes come with the ranger, the Sioux will slay them, for many of my young warriors have promised to go back to the village with Arapaho scalps."

The old scout saw at once what the chief was driving at, and he could do no better than to accept his proffered aid, or protection against the treachery of Rollo.

The Sioux seemed highly elated by his acceptance of their proffered friendship, and as night drew on, they began to secrete themselves in the woods surrounding the point of rendezvous.

Old Tumult and Town, for the first time, had the opportunity of seeing a party of savages ambushing themselves for an unsuspecting enemy.

Half crouching, they glided here and there like so many shadows, their eyes flashing with an evil, cunning light. They burrowed themselves beneath the old leaves and grass like moles; they pressed themselves into holes and crevices where it seemed a serpent could not hide. In five minutes time, Old Tumult and Town stood alone in the solitude of the great forest. It seemed almost impossible that they stood within a circle of three score bloodthirsty savages.

Night came on apace. There was a moon, but it would not be up till two hours after dark.

Our friends seated themselves in the path leading to the head of the Devil's Staircase. They started when the sound of horse's hoofs told them that some one was approaching from the east.

It was the ranger beyond a doubt.

Suddenly the tramp of hoofs ceased, and a voice called out:

"Hallo, Tumult!"

"Ay, Rollo; so you've come," responded the old scout.

They arose from their seat and approached the ranger, of whom they could catch a faint outline in the darkness.

The clear, frank voice of the ranger at once produced in the minds of the friends conflicting ideas. It seemed utterly impossible for one so young, and apparently kind-hearted, to be a traitor to his own race. He had done many kind acts for the settlers in warning them of coming danger of late. Yet, despite all this, Tumult and Town had seen sufficient of his actions in the ferry-boat affair to raise grave doubts, at least; however, they tried to believe that it all came of the impulse and indiscretion of youth.

"Any news from the captives, Rollo?" asked Town, as he neared the ranger.

"Nothing," the ranger responded; "of course they are in the Indian village, and the question is, how are we to get at them?"

"The only course I see is to fight our way in and release them, then fight our way out again, if we kin git 'em no other way," said Old Tumult.

"Ten to one we would all be killed," said Town.

"Well, we can try it," said Rollo; "faint heart ne'er won fair lady, Town."

Town was a little touched by this remark, which was slightly tainted with sarcasm; however, he forced back the retort that came to his lips, and made no reply.

There was a momentary silence, during which time the ranger toyed with the coiled horn at the pommel of his saddle.

Suddenly they were aroused by the sharp bark of a wolf, that echoed through the valley below them.

"How human-like is that cry," said Rollo, "and how it echoes through the valley."

"Yes, I'm thinking there's more human than wolf about the cry," said Town.

At this juncture, the jingle of the ranger's horn drew our friends' attention toward him. There was just light enough to see him place the instrument to his lips.

"Don't you," cried Old Tumult, but the sound of his voice was drowned in the blast of the horn.

"Ho, you young, traitorous villain!" roared the old scout, and he leaped toward the ranger, but the latter whirled his horse's head and dashed away.

Then there was a hurrying of many feet, the flitting of many dark forms—followed by the blood-chilling war-whoop of two score and ten Arapaho warriors, as they closed in upon our friends.

Where was Mahaska and his warriors now? Ah! where indeed?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAGEDY AT THE LAKE.

The dark line of Arapaho warriors stopped ere they had got within reach of our two friends, for scarcely had their own war-cry pealed from their own lips, when there arose a sound that seemed to issue from the earth, the sky and the air, so loud and fierce that the earth seemed to tremble beneath them.

Mahaska had been true to his word, and, with his warriors, had come to the rescue; and, after all, the Arapahoes were the surprised party, and like sheep they scattered and fled in every direction. Half of their number, however, fell under the blows of the Sioux.

Tumult and Town escaped without a scratch.

The following morning search was made among the dead for the body of Rollo, but it was not there.

In consequence of the defeat of the Arapahoes, Old Tumult and Mahaska became fast friends, and took another "pipe of peace" over the victory.

The chief now sent scouts in all directions to keep a watch upon the movements of the enemy, while Old Tumult and Town, accompanied by Mahaska, set off toward the Arapaho village to reconnoiter the situation.

Arriving in the vicinity of the village, they gained an eminence from which they could command a view of the encampment. They saw that great commotion prevailed within the village, and that the leading warriors were constantly going to and from the lodge of the prophet.

Mahaska smiled grimly as he watched these movements, for well he read their import.

A squad of some fifteen warriors leaving the village and moving in the direction of our friends, induced the latter to seek more secluded quarters.

In case that the rescue of the maidens could not be effected during the day, Mahaska had decided to make a night attack upon the village, and for that purpose had dispatched a messenger to his village for a reinforcement of warriors.

About two miles south of the Arapaho village was a small lake, which the chief had selected as the point of rendezvous for his warriors soon after nightfall; and as they saw there was not the shadow of a chance to rescue the maidens during the day, the chief, Old Tumult and Town, set off for the lake.

Arrived at the lake, the trio proceeded to procure some food, of which they were feeling greatly in need. Some venison was soon obtained and roasted, and a hearty meal made thereon. Then the party retired to a secluded spot near the edge of the lake to await the coming of night.

The day passed slowly away. To Town it seemed as though night would never come, and the more he thought of the trader's lovely daughter the more impatient he became.

At last the shades of evening began to gather over the silent forest.

The tree-frogs began their doleful piping and the crickets their mournful chirps; and as the shadows continued to thicken, the deep and solemn breathing of nature, peculiar to the wilderness after nightfall, was heard in all around.

One by one the stars looked out through the blue vault of heaven as the darkness increased.

The trio still remained within their covert, silent as the grave itself.

Suddenly their ears caught the sound of voices, and the tramp of feet coming up the stony path that wound along the shore of the little lakelet.

Old Tumult and his companions bent their heads and listened closely.

They heard the voices again. They were the voices of white persons, judging from the sound, a man and woman's.

With eyes and ears strained to the utmost, the trio watched and listened.

The footsteps came nearer and nearer, but the voices ceased.

A bare rock, over which ran the trail that the man and woman were following, and which jutted out over the waters of the lake, lay between our friends and the two unknown pedestrians.

Presently the latter emerged from the shadows of the woods into the opening on the rock. Here they halted. Our friends saw that it was a man and woman, sure enough. But who were they?

Neither spoke, and it was too dark to distinguish their features.

For several moments they stood upon the rock.

At last the woman asked:

"Why do you stop here?"

Town started. He recognized the voice, and its soft musical tone seemed to echo through the chambers of his wildly-throbbing heart.

The man made no reply to her question, but turning he seized her, dragged her to the edge of the rock, and hurled her over the precipice into the lake, twenty feet below.

There was a wild, despairing shriek—a loud splash in the water, then all was over.

"Save her, for God's sake, Mahaska!" whispered Town to the chief, who, like a shadow, glided from the young man's side as he spoke.

Old Tumult cocked his rifle, and leveled it at the breast of the unknown murderer, but he did not fire. The figure of another woman was seen to glide from the shadow of the woods, and throw herself into the open arms of the man.

"Thank God it is over with!" said the man.

"And we are rich—the Golden Horn is ours!" replied the woman.

Scarcely had the last word fallen from her lips, when two rifles on the opposite side of the opening rung out—a cry of mortal agony pealed from the lips of the man and woman—they staggered, reeled, and sank heavily to the earth.

Two Sioux Indians rushed from cover of the woods, and stooping, were in the act of scalping the fallen man and woman, when Old Tumult and Town rushed from their covert and prevented the bloody act.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VILLAIN DEFEATED.

DEFEATED in his repeated attempts to capture or kill Old Tumult and Town, upon Two Islands, Dick Sherwood returned to the Indian village, his feelings wrought up to the highest pitch of rage. And fuel was added to the consuming fire of his wrath, when the news of the slaughter of his warriors at the Devil's Staircase reached his ears.

The fates seemed against him. Every one of his daring and deep-laid plots of vengeance had failed, excepting the surprise at Wildwood lake.

The handsome devil cared nothing for the lives of the savages, only as far as his selfish wickedness was concerned. And to have accomplished the purpose of his will, he would have sacrificed every warrior in the tribe. However, when one plot failed, his wicked, fertile brain soon conceived another.

On the morning of the day that Clara Bryant had promised to marry him for her liberty, he came rushing into her lodge inquiring for Madge Taft. But, Madge was not there, and in a tone of ungovernable rage he declared she had escaped; and should he recapture her, he would inflict all sorts of punishment upon her.

Although Clara was glad that Madge had escaped, it made her feel more lonely and desolate, when she thought that she was entirely alone, so far as friends were concerned, in the midst of enemies.

She thought it very strange, too, that Madge would, or did leave, without hinting her intentions to her.

As the day wore away, Clara felt in hopes that Sherwood had given up his desire to marry her out of revenge, and that she would be set at liberty. However, in this she was bitterly disappointed. It wanted about an hour of sunset, when the renegade entered her lodge accompanied by a white man, whom he introduced as Father Jules, the missionary.

"I have come, Miss Bryant," the villain said, "to claim a fulfillment of your promise to wed me."

A low sob escaped poor Clara's lips, and she turned ghastly pale.

"Are you not sick, my dear child?" asked Father Jules.

"No, sir," faintly articulated the maiden, whose senses seemed deserting her, and whose heart grew sick and faint.

"And you are willing to become the wife of Richard Sherwood, are you?" questioned the missionary.

Clara answered in the affirmative, though she was almost totally unconscious of what was passing about her, and but for the support of the renegade she would have fallen.

In this state of semi-consciousness the maiden stood by the side of Sherwood, and the marriage ceremony was performed.

When the missionary pronounced them man and wife, Clara had wholly fainted. Restoratives, however, were immediately applied, and she was brought back to consciousness.

As soon as the ceremony was performed, Father Jules seated himself, and taking from his pocket a strip of paper, wrote thereon the following:

"September 20th, 18—

"I, Victor Jules, a regularly ordained minister of the church of the Holy Evangelist, hereby certify that on this day, I joined in the holy bonds of wedlock, Richard Sherwood and Clara Holmes.

"VICTOR JULES."

This certificate the missionary gave to Sherwood, who read it, smiled, folded it up and put it carefully away in an inner pocket.

Victor Jules soon took his departure from the lodge, and when they were alone, Sherwood turned to Clara, and said:

"My dear little wife, you have been honest in fulfilling your agreement, now I shall fulfill mine and set you at liberty."

Clara's eyes brightened, and her heart beat more hopeful to think that she was going to be released. She felt certain that when she was beyond Sherwood's power, he would have no claim upon her as a husband; for, in her innocent heart she knew the ceremony was all a farce, and she had very grave doubts as to Victor Jules being a missionary. But, why it was that Sherwood had taken this course for revenge upon Town. Farnsworth, was a mystery to her. He surely had sense enough to know that the marriage was not binding upon them. But, alas! Clara did not—could not read the secret intentions of the villain's heart.

"And am I to return to the post alone?" she asked.

"No; I will escort you as far as Talbott Taft's cabin," he returned; "that is as close to the post as will be safe for my neck."

"And when are we to start?" Clara asked.

"At once."

The news was joyful to the maiden. She could scarcely refrain from clapping her hands and shouting with joy and thanks.

By this time it was nearly sunset, and ere the renegade and maiden had taken their departure from the village, the shadows of evening had begun to gather over the woodland, and lurk assassin-like in the valleys.

They set off on foot, following a plain-beaten path through the forest, southward.

The journey before her was a long one, but Clara was so overpowered with joy, that she had never taken one thought of her inability to ever reach the post on foot.

The two moved on in silence for about a mile or more, when Sherwood spoke.

"Clara," he said, "have you any recollections of your early childhood—that is, do you recollect any thing of your early home in Ohio?"

The maiden was not a little surprised by this strange question, and it was quite a while before she could gain composure to reply:

"Why should I not, when it has been but a few years since I left there?"

"Then you know that you are not the child of Geoffrey Bryant," the renegade said.

Clara started at the question. Never had it been breathed to her before that she was not the child of those whom she had loved as father and mother since her childhood recollections. And why should the renegade know more of her than she did herself?

"I know no such a thing," she replied, a little indignantly.

"Well, I know that you are *not* the child of Geoffrey Bryant," Sherwood replied.

"How do you know it?" she asked.

The villain made no reply, for at this juncture they emerged into a small opening at the edge of a little lake, where the renegade stopped.

"Why do you stop here?" Clara asked.

Still the villain made no reply, but, turning, he seized the maiden, dragged her to the edge of the opening, and hurled her over the cliff into the lake below.

What followed this murderous deed the reader already knows.

CHAPTER XV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"WHAT in the name of the holy tortures does this all mean?" yelled Old Tumult, as he knelt by the prostrate form of the man, while Town. Farnsworth knelt by the woman.

The scout bent low and gazed into the face of the man.

A shout, that rolled through the forest aisles like a peal of thunder, burst from his lips. He recognized the face of the man.

It was that of Dick Sherwood!

The old scout communicated his discovery to Town., and then asked:

"Who've you got thar, Town.?"

A groan burst from the young man's lips, and he started up.

"What's up, what's up?" questioned the scout.

"Oh, God! my eyes deceive me, Tumult!" he cried, "or else that is the face of Madge Taft."

"Holy smoke o' torture!" burst from Tumult's lips, as he knelt by the motionless form of the woman, and gazed into her face. "Yes, yes; it is the trader's gal, but she is not dead."

A moan of pain from the woman's lips verified his assertion.

"Water, Tumult, water!" cried Town.; "let us save her, if we can."

"It is no use, Town.; nothing can save me."

It was the woman who spoke, in a feeble, smothered tone, as she nervously clutched at her throbbing brow.

"My God, Madge! is this reality, or some horrid vision?" cried Town., dropping on his knees beside her, and raising her head from the hard stone and pillowing it on his breast.

"Yes, Town.—but save her—save Clara! It was she that he threw over the cliff!—save her, for she loves you!"

"The chief will save her; rest easy—"

"The chief!" she interrupted, with almost a shriek.

"Yes; Mahaska, the Sioux chief," replied Town.

"Ah!" she sighed, painfully, "that accounts for our defeat."

"Your defeat? what do you mean, dear Madge?"

"Oh, Town., I have been such a wicked woman—I have plotted deeply and darkly against you and Clara. I won your affections from her, and yet I was a married woman—the lawful wife of—"

The name was lost in a moan of pain, and Town. felt a repulsive flush mount to his face.

He would have shrunk away from her as from an adder, had he not remembered that she was dying—dying so young, so beautiful, so wicked, so false-hearted.

There was a momentary silence which was broken by the dying woman's voice:

"Town.," she said, "although I have been your worst enemy, I want to ask one request of you."

"Name it," said Town., "and it shall be granted."

"Then after I am dead, I want you to convey my body and the body of Dick Sherwood to the cabin of Talbott Taft."

"It shall be done, I promise you," said Town.; "but, what is Dick Sherwood to you, Madge?"

"Town., I am dying fast. I have but a few minutes to live. I would tell you all about my life and the deep, dark game of sin and treachery in which I have been engaged, could I live long enough. But when you convey my lifeless body and that of Dick Sherwood to the cabin of the Indian trader, he will tell you—tell you all. Oh, if I only knew that Clara escaped."

At this juncture the quick, heavy tread of moccasined feet was heard approaching, and the next moment Mahaska drew near with the dripping form of Clara Bryant in his arms.

"Is she dead, chief?" asked Old Tumult.

"No," responded the chief, "but she is unconscious."

"Thank God!" cried Town.; then bending low to the dying woman, he said:

"She lives, Madge."

The woman made no reply, but there was a rattling in her throat—a convulsive stiffening of the limbs and body. Then there was a relaxing of the muscles, that told of the separation of the soul and body—that Madge Taft was dead.

Town. laid the lifeless body gently down, and then went and assisted Old Tumult and Mahaska in restoring Clara to life.

The fall and the effects of the water together had proven a terrible shock to the maiden, and for awhile her life was despaired of. But, at last, she began to recover.

By this time all of Mahaska's warriors had gathered at the lake ready for work, but in consequence of the escape of the captives, the attack was postponed.

As Clara would be unable to travel before morning, dispositions were made for passing the night by the lake, Mahaska and his warriors taking the safety of the party into their own hands.

The night passed miserably enough to the whites, and it was a great relief to their minds when morning dawned bright and pleasant.

Breakfasting on roasted venison, the party was soon ready for departure.

Mahaska and some of his warriors were to accompany the whites to Clontarf's Post, and to them were given the two bodies for conveyance to the trader's cabin.

Town. gave his attention to Clara Bryant, who, after all, he discovered he loved, though he was almost ashamed to admit it, even to himself, since he had acted so unfaithful toward her

in his fancied love for the fascinating and wicked Madge Taft.

When all were ready for starting, Town. drew the maiden's arm within his own and set off in advance. He did not tell her of the fate of Sherwood and Madge, as she had been kept beyond sight of the bodies while at the lake; but, while moving along through the woods, she happened to glance back and saw the savages in the rear of the procession bearing something upon litters. This aroused her curiosity and she inquired of Town. what it meant.

Town. gently broke to her the news of the death of Sherwood and Madge.

"Thank God, I am free then!"

The words burst involuntarily from Clara's lips, and they were no sooner spoken than she seemed to have regretted their utterance.

"Why, yes, Clara," laughed Town., "you are free. Did you think I was Sherwood?"

Clara smiled as she raised her eyes and gazed into Town.'s face.

"No, Town.," she replied, "I had reference to something else. I will tell you what it is another time."

Town. was a little mystified, still he was too thoughtful of her wishes to insist on an explanation, and so he said nothing more on the subject.

It was past noon when the cabin of Talbott Taft was reached. They found the old trader at home in a state of great excitement, occasioned, he said, by the absence of his daughter.

Town. told him that he had bad news for him, and proceeded to break it to him as gently as possible.

A wail burst from the old man's lips, and staggering he sunk heavily into a chair.

In a few moments the savages bearing the litters filed into the cabin and placed the bodies before the old man, who fell upon his knees and wept bitterly over the body of Madge.

Our friends and the savages went out into the yard and left the mourner alone with his dead, and when his lamentations had ceased, Old Tumult went back to the door and asked:

"Is thar enny thing, Mr. Taft, that we kin do fur you?"

A wail of sorrow burst anew from the trader's lips and it was several moments before he gained calmness to reply.

"Nothing, Tumult, nothing, unless you help me to bury my dead."

"That we'll do," returned the scout; "you have only to command us."

"A grave will have to be dug, and—"

Here his voice broke down, and he sobbed bitterly.

Old Tumult went out, and with the assistance of Town. and Mahaska, hollowed out two graves in the shadow of an oak that stood in front of the cabin.

The bodies were then wrapped in blankets and carried out and laid in the graves, and covered from the view of the world forever.

The old trader moaned as though his heart would break, and when our friends had announced their intention of departing for the post, he called Old Tumult and Town. aside and said:

"Tumult I want you and Town. to come here to-morrow morning. Will you promise me that you will?"

"We will," responded the two in a breath.

"Do not fail. I have something to reveal to you—something that may be of interest to you both. I wish to show you the reward of the wicked and the wages of sin."

"We will come without fail," said Old Tumult.

"And so the whites and the Sioux took their departure from the cabin, and Talbott Taft was left alone to weep and mourn.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISE.

"THE Indians are coming! the Indians are coming! to arms! to arms!"

This was the startling cry that ran from lip to lip throughout Clontarf's Post, as the hardy yeomanry of the settlement flew to their cabins for their arms, and hurried their wives and little ones away to the block-house. Those living just outside of the stockade were soon within the inclosure, whose gates were then securely barred and bolted against the party of Indians that had been discovered crossing the river a short distance above the post.

Old Captain Storms, the military head and center of the post, was the first to discover the enemy, and he gave it as his firm belief that a hot time might be expected, for he said the enemy numbered two hundred strong—that

they were a war-party bent upon death and destruction.

In a few minutes the settlers were prepared for defense, although they were not, by any means, prepared for a lengthy siege.

Father Earnshaw and Captain Storms now ascended to the top of the block-house to watch the movements of the enemy, while the settlers stood, rifle in hand, ready for the conflict.

The two sentinels on the block-house were not a little surprised to see the enemy marching bodily down the river toward the stockade.

"Ah! here they come, boys, three hundred strong!" the old captain shouted to the men below; "stand by your arms, for a bloody time is coming!"

Father Earnshaw looked at the enemy until his eyes grew misty—he then took off his spectacles, wiped them, put them on again, glanced at the enemy, then turned to the old man-of-war at his side, and said:

"Surely, captain, your eyesight is failing you, for according to my estimate of the enemy's force, you have exaggerated their number in the ratio of about ten to one."

"Your eyes deceive you, Mr. Earnshaw," returned the stern old warrior; "long experience in just such matters has enabled me to tell the number of the enemy, or a body of men, at sight."

"Excitement sometimes, captain, multiplies the amount of danger in the mind's eye, as I think it has in your case; for, come down to the fact of the matter, I don't believe it is a war-party at all."

"Man! man!" exclaimed Storms, "do not let the thoughts of a battle—of danger, destroy thy throne of reason. Better go down into the block-house."

Father Earnshaw could not help laughing at the old captain's wild excitement.

"Look there, captain!" he finally exclaimed; "as I live, Old Tumult and Town, Farnsworth and Clara Bryant are at the head of your war-party of three hundred."

The captain looked long and closely at the approaching party, rubbed his eyes, chafed his bald crown, glanced at Earnshaw, then at the party again, moved uneasily, and at last burst into a roar of laughter, which of itself was sufficient to show his perplexity and embarrassment.

"I thought, Mr. Earnshaw—"

But Mr. Earnshaw was gone. He had slipped away from the captain, who was a little hard of hearing as well as defective in seeing, and descending from the block-house, he approached the men and told them of the captain's scare, and the real nature of the approaching party of savages.

The gate of the stockade was at once thrown open, and Old Tumult, Town, and Clara, and the Indian escort of about a score in number, admitted amid ringing shouts of joy and welcome.

Town conducted Clara to the cabin of her father, while Old Tumult explained to the settlers why Mahaska and his warriors were there.

The joy of Mr. and Mrs. Bryant was exceedingly great, when their only child was once more restored to their hearts. And the settlers all partook of their joy.

After the excitement of the happy meeting was over, and Clara and her mother found themselves alone, the former drew near the latter and said:

"Mother, am I your child?"

Mrs. Bryant started.

"Why, Clara, you surprise me!" she exclaimed.

"I see I do, mother," replied Clara, "but Dick Sherwood told me that I was not your child."

Mrs. Bryant turned very pale, and Clara saw at once that she was greatly agitated.

"Is it true, mother?" she asked, her arms stealing softly around the matron's neck.

"It is, it is, Clara! alas, it is too true; but how could that villain, Dick Sherwood, ever have gained the truth? What did he say about it, Clara?"

Clara told her all that Sherwood had said, and even of her marriage with him, and the reason why she had married him, and the subsequent death of Sherwood and Madge Taft.

Mrs. Bryant was completely overwhelmed by this revelation of matters, and after trying to unburden her perplexed mind, she said:

"No, Clara, you are not my child. I took you to raise when you were but two years old."

"Are either of my parents living?" Clara asked.

"Your father may be, but your mother is dead, and it is by her dying request that I have never told you before of your being an orphan."

"And have I no relations living?"

"Your mother said she had a brother living, but she had not heard of him for ten years, up to the hour of her death."

"And you said my father *might* be living, did you not?"

"Yes; since the worst is known, I may as well tell all. Domestic trouble separated your parents. Your father enlisted as a soldier in the Mexican war, and as he never came back, it was supposed that he fell at the battle of Chalpultepec. Your mother died shortly after the separation. Your father I never saw."

"And so none of the settlers here know but what I am your child?"

"No. We came from the State of Maine here, while most of the settlers are from Ohio—that is, we went from Maine to Ohio, and from there came here."

Clara bowed her head and wept sadly—bit-terly.

CHAPTER XVII.

A REVELATION.

TRUE to their promise, Old Tumult and Town, returned to the cabin of Talbott Taft the following morning.

As they approached the lonely hut, they saw no sign of life about it, but pushing on they reached the door, upon which Town, gently rapped. But no one bade them enter, and it was then that a strange suspicion rushed across our two friends' minds, and pushing the door open they entered.

True enough, their suspicions were verified by seeing Talbott Taft sitting bolt-upright in a chair near a rude table, stone *dead*!

"Self-destruction," muttered Town, as he pointed to a glass upon the table, in which there was some liquid of a greenish color; and then as his eyes fell upon a folded paper near the glass, he continued: "and here is no doubt a written confession, and a lengthy one, too, for there are a number of pages."

He unfolded the papers and glanced at the head of the writing, which was well executed, though it showed some nervousness of the writer.

"ROMANTIC IMAGINATION—TRAGICAL REAL-ITY."

These were the words heading the MS., and Town, at once perceived that the writer thereof had been fostering some romantic hopes that had ended in a tragical death.

The first thing our friends did was to bury the body of the trader by the side of his daughter. This last sad duty performed, the scout and Town returned to the cabin and seated themselves. Town now took up the manuscript and began reading it aloud.

It ran thus:

"In one of the loveliest rural districts of Virginia is a grand estate, with a great stone mansion and lovely surroundings—all that heart could wish, art devise, and wealth procure—known as The Golden Horn. Four years ago the owner of The Golden Horn lay dying. He was a bachelor, and no wife nor child was there to mourn his coming death. Only Mrs. Martha Hohn, his housekeeper, sat by his dying bed.

"Mrs. Hohn was herself a widow, with an only child, Cecil, who at this time was away at Richmond attending a boarding-school at the expense of the owner of The Golden Horn. Mrs. Hohn, for years, had secretly aspired to be mistress of The Golden Horn, but all her charms and suavity of manners failed to make an impression on the hard heart of the stern old bachelor. And now he lay dying, and Mrs. Hohn's aspirations and hopes were dying, too.

"'Martha Hohn,' he said, as she seated herself by his bed, 'I'm dying, that's certain. The death-dews are upon my brow now. And now, Martha, promise me upon my death-bed that you will do me a favor after I'm dead and gone. You've been kind to me, Martha, and straightforward, and of all others, I would trust none sooner than you with so important a care. Promise me, Martha Hohn.'

Martha Hohn promised by all that was sacred.

"Then," continued the dying man, "away up in Maine, on the Penobscot river, years ago dwelt an only sister, but she is dead now. She married there, and had a child—a daughter, whom she called Clara. Domestic troubles finally parted sister and her husband. He went to the war, and sister died. But her baby lived, and was adopted by a Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Bryant. Where the Bryants are, I do not know, but I want you to find them, Martha, and give to their adopted child, Clara, this will (here he drew from under his pillow a folded paper) which gives to her The Golden Horn. She is the last of my relations now living. For all I know she may be dead. If she is dead, she may

have married, and may have a husband or child living; if so, give the will to them."

"Mrs. Hohn renewed her promise to the dying man, though the devil took possession of her heart the moment she got the will in her fingers."

"The owner of The Golden Horn died, and Mrs. Hohn became more determined than ever to possess the estate."

"She hastened to Richmond and found that her daughter Cecil had just been married to a handsome, but penniless man whose morals were any thing but good. Mrs. Hohn made known her resolve to her son-in-law and daughter. Both were as wicked as she, and so they volunteered their assistance to aid her in her dark scheme."

"The trio went up to Maine and found that Geoffrey Bryant had moved several years ago to Ohio. So they followed on to Ohio, and were there disappointed by learning that Mr. Bryant and family had gone with a colony to the then territory of Iowa."

"The trio rigged themselves out with a conveyance and set out for the Far West. It was more than two years before they found out the exact whereabouts of Bryant, and during this time they took up their residence with the Arapaho Indians. Cecil's husband, by dint of much deceit and trickery, worked himself into the confidence of the Indians so thoroughly, that they conferred upon him the honor of prophet. But much to their disadvantage in playing for The Golden Horn, the prophet's name and fame went abroad among the Arapaho's enemies, the white settlers, and so it became dangerous for him to venture within a white settlement."

"When Mrs. Hohn found that Bryant resided at Clontarf's Post, she began laying her plans. She found that Clara, the heir to The Golden Horn, had grown to a beautiful womanhood, and was on the eve of marriage with Town Farnsworth. All this they learned through Rollo, the Boy Ranger."

"Smoke o' torture!" exclaimed Old Tumult; "I told ye that 'ere boy war a young devil."

Town made no reply, but read on:

"The first thing to be done was to prevent the marriage of Town and Clara. And Mrs. Hohn at once proposed that her daughter Cecil win Town's affections from Clara, until Clara could be disposed of as they desired."

"About this time Mrs. Hohn very suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from the stage of action. But her son and daughter continued the work of crime."

"Cecil now assume the name of Madge Taft, and went to reside with Talbott Taft, the Indian trader, as his daughter."

"Here she met Town Farnsworth, and true enough, succeeded in winning him from Clara."

"The next work to be done was to secure Clara's right to The Golden Horn. This was the most difficult portion of the whole plot. However, Cecil's husband, who was none other than Dick Sherwood, resolved to kidnap Clara—carry her to the Indian village, and there force her into a mock marriage with him—obtain a certificate of the marriage—put Clara out of the way, and then return to Virginia, and by presenting the will and certificate both in probate, establish his right to The Golden Horn. Then as it was not known that he was already Cecil's husband in the vicinity of The Golden Horn, he could enter into another marriage with her, and thereby cover up all suspicions of their previous relationship, should any such suspicions arise."

"The first attempt, however, to carry Clara away resulted in the capture of Sherwood, and but for the timely arrival of Rollo, the ranger, it would have ended in his death by hanging in the forest. The young ranger cut the rope with his saber, the instant that the settlers turned their faces toward the post, and a friend to the unfortunate man came from his concealment in the woods near the scene of the execution, and restored him to consciousness. In order to mislead the settlers, the body of a Sioux Indian, slain by Rollo, was hung to the limb where Sherwood had been left. The wolves and vultures stripped the bones of its flesh, thereby the detection of the cheat was never found out until after the attack at Wildwood lake. This latter affair was all owing to the wicked cunning of Sherwood, *alias* Father Ainesley. He had hoped, that by drawing the settlers out to the meeting beyond reach of their stronghold, he would not only capture Clara, but wreak vengeance upon them for the 'hanging affair' in the forest. In this he partially succeeded through the co-operation of the duck-disguised Arapahoes. Clara was captured by Ainesley during the conflict, and along with

Madge, who assumed the rôle of prisoner also, for purposes that are plainly significant, carried away; but she and Madge were recaptured, as was also Sherwood, by Old Tumult and Town. A storm coming up, they sought shelter upon Two Islands. While there, *Madge succeeded in releasing Sherwood*. And together they escaped, carrying Clara away with them, though Clara knew not the part that Madge was playing.

"Madge shouting for help, when away from the islands, was all a cover to conceal suspicion.

"I will here mention, that Rollo did know of the four savages being in the hold of the ferry-boat. It was an arrangement for the capture of the scout and Town."

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared Old Tumult; "it was a glorious failure, too, I'm dreamin', eh boy?"

"Indeed it was," returned Town, then he read on:

"Rollo and Sherwood laid another trap at the Devil's Staircase, for the capture of Tumult and his friend, but this failed, also; so Rollo informed me the morning following the defeat.

"The ranger also informed me that through the instrumentality of Madge Taft, Clara had been induced to marry Sherwood. The renegade promised her that he would liberate her and Madge just as soon as the wedding was over, and a certificate of the missionary—who was gotten up on purpose for the occasion, he being a white-renegade called Tom Jules—securely in his pocket. Sherwood's intention was to drown Clara in the lake when pretending to escort her home. Madge was to meet him there at the lake, when they would at once take their departure for the East—he to prove claim to The Golden Horn as the husband of the deceased heiress. What more would really be necessary to establish his claim, according to the will? Nothing. But, alas! in the very hour, yea, the very minute of their triumph, death seized them both!

"Thus you have a full confession of the sins of Martha Hohn and her son-in-law and daughter. And perhaps you would ask, where was Martha Hohn during the latter part of this wicked drama? I would answer: Martha Hohn writes this confession, for Martha Hohn and Talbot Taft are one and the same! I donned my disguise to aid Dick and Cecil in their work of wickedness that was hatched in my own brain.

"And what has become of Rollo, the ranger, will be asked as time goes by, for Rollo will never again appear on the stage of action. It has often been a source of great wonder to me, that Town Farnsworth, in his attentions to Madge, and his conferences with Rollo, did not detect that Madge and Rollo were one and the same person!

"Poor Cecil! she was brave, daring and strong, and played her part with all the skill of an accomplished actress. She deserved a better fate, but for the influence around her, might have won it.

"On the table by my side, in the little tin box, is the will that I promised by all that was sacred to deliver to Clara Holmes. Will the reader of this deliver it to her? It is my last request.

MARTHA HOHN."

And thus ended the manuscript, leaving Town, wrapt in wonder and surprise, while Old Tumult seemed terribly agitated.

"Of all the complicated cases of sin and sinners in disguise this beats me," exclaimed Town.

Old Tumult made no reply. His agitation seemed to be increasing.

"What's the matter, Tumult?" asked Town.

"Holmes! Holmes!" muttered the scout, as though he was unconscious of so doing, "as God's in heaven, it must be so!" and then springing to his feet he cried, excitedly:

"Come, lad, let's rack out for the post! I believe I've struck a bee-line! Fetch the will, lad."

Town made no reply, for the scout darted out of the cabin and away toward the post, at such a rapid speed, that he could scarcely keep in sight of him.

"I declare, the old chap is terribly excited," muttered Town, as he proceeded onward through the forest.

When he reached the post, the old scout bent his footsteps toward Geoffrey Bryant's cabin.

At the door he was met by Clara.

"Why, Tumult—Mr. Raynor!" the maiden exclaimed, "you are excited—what is wrong?"

Tumult laid his hand upon the maiden's head, and gazed into her eyes as though he were going to read her heart through.

"And are you Clara Holmes?" he cried.

"Yes; so mother—Mrs. Bryant—just told me, but—"

"Have you no remembrance of your parents?" interrupted the scout.

"I have none," returned Clara, sadly. At this juncture, Mrs. Bryant made her appearance, and having overheard their conversation, said:

"Clara was but two years old when her mother died, Mr. Raynor, consequently she could not be expected to remember much of her."

"But the father?" exclaimed the scout.

"He parted from her mother a year before she died."

"Did you know him, Mrs. Bryant?"

"I did not. I never saw him. He went to the Mexican war and never came back."

"What was his full name?"

"Clement Holmes, so his wife told me."

"Clement Holmes!" burst from the scout's lips; "then, thank God! Clara, you are my child! I am Clement Holmes!"

Yes, Old Tumult, or Roll Raynor, proved himself to be the father of Clara—Clement Holmes! I will not attempt to describe the scenes of joy and happiness that followed this revelation, for they defy the power of this pen. The reader can imagine what they must have been.

Following the reunion of father and daughter, came the news of Clara being the heiress to a vast fortune in Virginia, by what means is already known.

I will not undertake to narrate the scenes and adventures through which Old Tumult passed after his separation from his wife, up to his meeting with his child; suffice it to say that they were many—wild and dangerous.

Clara, as the wife of Townsend Farnsworth, returned with her husband to Virginia, and proved her claim to The Golden Horn.

She forgave him his love affair with Madge Taft, though he can not forgive himself for being made the dupe of the wicked enchantress.

After much persuasion, Old Tumult was induced to leave the West with its wild adventure, and take up his home with his children in Virginia, among the quietudes of civilization. Still there was scarcely a day during the remainder of his eventful life but what the voice of his heavy rifle, Vibrator, might have been heard rolling in prolonged reverberations through the mountains that formed the southern boundary of The Golden Horn. And after the day's hunt was over, and the strong old hunter returned to the mansion, with his game-bag well filled, he was always met at the gate by a group of urchins, who welcomed him with their childish shouts of joy, and who called him "Grandpa."

And here, dear reader, I let drop the curtain over my imperfect—yet I hope interesting—drama, and lay down my pen.

THE END.

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